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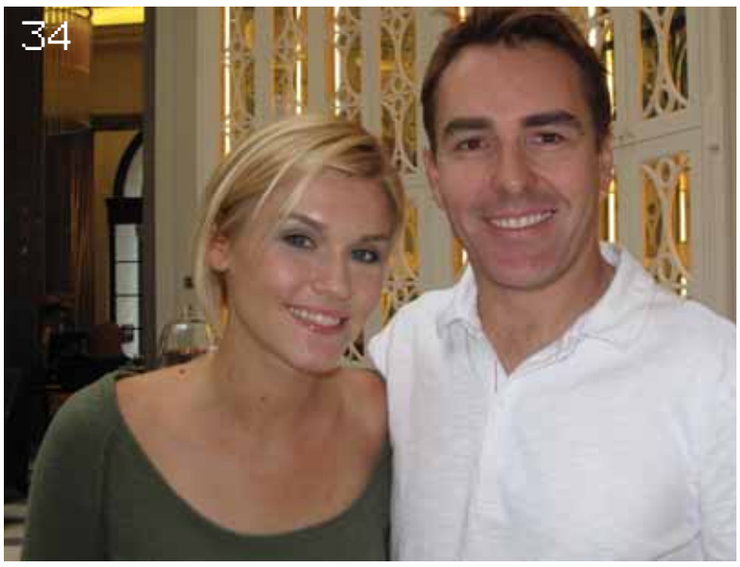

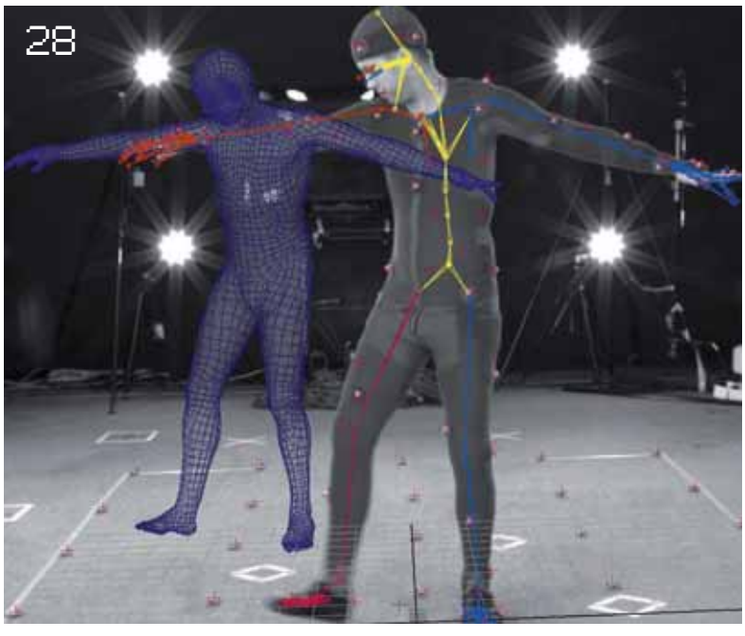

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ALPHA

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Reaching for the sky

Zelda producer Eiji Aonuma and composer Koji Kondo talk to **Develop** about raising the quality bar, orchestrating an epic score and why the series is still relevant 25 years on **p5**

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Editorial

BACK AND FORTH

With Christmas almost upon us, all of the year's most significant games are wrapped, distributed and in the hands of consumers, meaning that the last few days of 2011 are a chance for reflection.

For *Zelda* producer Eiji Aonuma and composer Koji Kondo it is an opportunity not just to ponder the development of *Skyward Sword*, but an amazing 25 years of the series' history. Starting from this very page, there's a chance to listen in on their musings about staying creatively motivated and passing on the responsibility of one of Nintendo's most significant properties.

Beginning on page 34 the cast from *Uncharted 3* also take some time to consider their time with a much loved series, and offer some fascinating insights into the changing role of actors in game development.

Thespians also star in our four page focus on the ever complicated world of motion capture, which takes a detailed look at the tools, tech and performers at the centre of so many game development projects already underway.

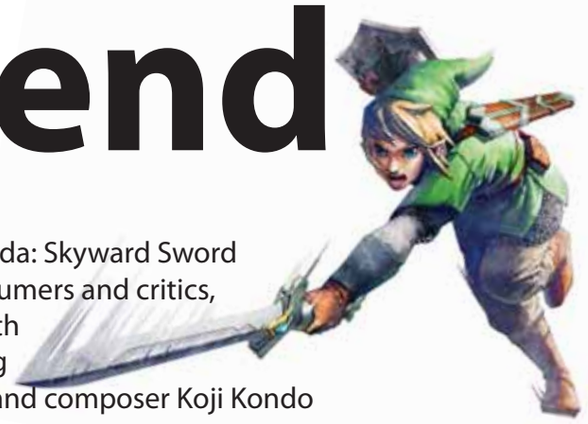
It's not all about looking back however. This time of year also affords the industry an opportunity to look forward to the highlights 2012 is set to bring us.

Recognising this, the issue you hold in your hands contains our annual 30 Under 30 showcase. From page 23 onwards, we shine the *Develop* talent spotlight on the most deserving – and frustratingly youthful – of the industry's future. Take a look at their faces and remember their names, for they are likely to make a mark in 2012 and beyond.

And then there's our cover feature, which highlights design studio Ustwo – who recently spent £150,000 developing *Whale Trail* – as one to watch. They may be new to building games, but they sure know how to make a success of app development. My guess? They'll be back.

Will Freeman
will.freeman@intentmedia.co.uk

Making a legend



With The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword currently wowing consumers and critics, **Develop** caught up with the series' longstanding producer Eiji Aonuma and composer Koji Kondo

Why does the *Zelda* series still resonate with the public after 25 years?
Eiji Aonuma: I think it's because *Zelda* doesn't fit into any gaming genre perfectly. Really what we've always aimed for is not about fitting one particular game genre, but to keep providing unique experiences that people can enjoy.

Of course, there are certain techniques and certain basics that are similar throughout the series, but really what we are striving to do with each new *Zelda* is offer a new world for people to enjoy and to experience.

Over those 25 years, while we've been working on the *Zelda* series and creating the games, we've always had a wealth of ideas, and as we've worked there's always been a surplus of new ideas, which I think is what has kept us going all these years.

So how do you filter those ideas so as to make sure each *Zelda* game meets the quality bar?
Aonuma: Perhaps it is a little bit strange for me to just say good things about my staff, but it really is about the team. I have a team of superb artists, engineers, creators and everything else, and Mr Kondo and his sound team are very talented and strong.

People have a lot of ideas of their own, but we are very strict with ourselves.

Working with those people, everyone is striving to make each *Zelda* game better than the last one, focussing on making something more and more polished.

My role in this process now is to really just create the basic grounding for these creative people to allow them to really flourish and really show their potential.

And how do you keep yourself and those staff creatively motivated and enthusiastic when the *Zelda* series has been around for so long?
Aonuma: My staff really are driven and kept motivated by the idea of seeing the players enjoy their creations. That is what I try and make them strive for and that is why they invest part of their life over many years into these games.

In my case, for me it is about Impressing Mr Miyamoto; that's the big one and that's what keeps me motivated.

What new opportunities has working on *Skyward Sword* afforded you both professionally? How has it allowed you to further your creative visions?
Koji Kondo: For me, on the music side of things, using a full orchestra for the first time in a *Zelda* game was really important for us. Of course there is a tradition of music that runs through the *Zelda* games, through *Ocarina* to today, and of course we've had big pieces of music before. But at Nintendo we decided that using a full orchestra would be perfect for *Skyward Sword*, where you have this big sky to fill, and a need to get across this concept of a vast sky and the game's grandness.

That gave me the huge opportunity to work with a full orchestra on a *Zelda* game.

Another new opportunity for me came about because of Wii MotionPlus and full motion control. It became possible for me to introduce a harp as a fully playable instrument to the game.

With regards to the music, how have you gone about capturing the feel of what defines *Zelda* music with this new desire to fill the game's vast skies with a new sound? Is that challenging for you as a video games sound designer?
Kondo: I'd say that is more or less a tradition of the *Zelda* series to always introduce new things and new challenges, and looking back that applies to the music too.

Of course, it's quite difficult for me to pinpoint what is the *Zelda* audio tradition and how we keep that. But it has always been our role to innovate and try new things, so that has become easy for us as audio teams.

And how have you used your previous experience making *Zelda* titles to make *Skyward Sword* a better game?
Aonuma: The development of *Skyward Sword*, I would say, started with reflection on *Twilight Princess* with a view to try and fix lots of the things that we felt weren't perfect.

Eiji Aonuma (far left) and Koji Kondo (left) wanted to use an orchestra to help bring Skyward's grand scale to life

Twilight Princess was a very big environment, and what we were really aiming for was realness; we wanted to have this real world experience. Looking back I feel that it was maybe too big and there were maybe not enough things in the environment for players to enjoy and challenge.

Looking back at *Twilight Princess,* my determination and my aim with the new *Zelda* was to make the game not only big and the environment very large, but to offer many experiences along the way as people journey through the world. This is why there are three big areas on the surface and the huge town Skyloft. Even when you revisit areas all over the environment there are new experiences and themes that can help the player connect their memories through the game and let them get to know the world more deeply.

Was there an overarching design theme or idea that directed the game's development?
Aonuma: Where *Twilight Princess* was about realness, this time it is really about bringing the game's areas to life; to make players understand and feel the history behind the game, and to deepen the feeling of experiencing it.

> ***"It is really about bringing the game's areas to life; to make players understand and feel the history behind the game."***
>
> Eiji Aonuma, Nintendo

And does working in the shadow of the success of *Ocarina of Time* concern you?
Aonuma: Of course, I wouldn't deny that I am always aware of the game and the praise it has received, and how much people like the game.

On the other hand, I do believe that all the *Zelda* games since have offered new aspects to the gameplay and setting.

We just recently did the 3DS version of *Ocarina* where we changed some things, and there were still difficulties. Even with that version of the game there were things we could improve upon. One big issue we have dealt with is the saving system, where now you do not have to start the game over from the start point.

So does bettering *Ocarina* motivate you?
Aonuma: Yes, absolutely. But it's not only *Ocarina of Time*. We look at every past *Zelda* title in the franchise, with a view to make people realise that the game has grown and improved. This is what we are aiming for with every release.

How do you approach making the music distinct to *Skyward Sword* in particular?
Kondo: Today I find myself only creating a very few pieces of music for the new games. My concern is about my new younger staff who are creating all sorts of music for *Skyward Sword*. What I always say is that they must go ahead and create new things. Of

The Zelda franchise recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with a live concert of orchestral music playing the game's famous music

course they listen to the existing *Zelda* music, and try and inherit the spirit of it, but my focus is on encouraging new things that fit a new *Zelda*.

Is handing over the responsibility of crafting new music at all difficult for you?
Kondo: No. It is exciting. It's not at all worrying. It's really positively surprising to see the new ideas, and the new flourishes the young talent brings. It would be really nice for me, of course, if I could just focus all my efforts on the music for one *Zelda* game. Now, however, I have many more responsibilities, so I am happy for the young team to have their chance.

What is it about the *Zelda* music that so enchants people? Just recently you sold out a concert of *Zelda* music in London.
Kondo: That's very difficult to say. We're always trying to craft music that stays in the mind and is associated with memories. That's what we aim for, but as I rarely see the people playing the games, it is hard know how they respond. How popular this concert has been certainly helps, and it has made me very happy to see.

> ***"We've managed to use orchestral music and make it interactive for the player, which we are very pleased with."***
>
> Koji Kondo, Nintendo

***Skyward Sword*, as you said, is the first *Zelda* game to use a full orchestra. How did that challenge you?**
Kondo: The real challenge in using an orchestra came from the fact that the music in *Zelda* is real-time and interactive, in that it changes dues to the player's actions. That was very difficult to achieve with an orchestra. In fact, initially I thought it might be absolutely impossible, but it is something we achieved. We'd learned a lot from working with an orchestra on *Super Mario Galaxy*. We've managed to use orchestral music and make it interactive for the player, which we are very pleased with.

What is most core to the *Zelda* experience? What is so sacred to the series it could never be changed?
Aonuma: Well. Zelda has to be in the title. That's something we could never change [much laughter].

That's not everything though. There's something that makes even the most distinct *Zelda* games feel similar in spirit.
Aonuma: Many people ask about that 'Zelda-ness', and I think Mr Miyamoto would say the same as me. What makes a game a *Zelda* game is the theme of uniqueness that we strive for.

A *Zelda* game should never be similar to anything else or resemble other games. This is always what we aim for, and that striving for uniqueness is the common denominator across the series.

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//COMMENT: BUSINESS

European gaming's venture capital problem

by **Nick Gibson**, Games Investor Consulting

While Europe is strong in the browser MMO space with games like Bigpoint's Drakensang Online (above), it has a long way to go in the mobile and social sectors to attract more investors

IN THE NEW world order of web, mobile and social gaming, the concept of independent studios relying on publishers for development finance has, for many, already been consigned to history with the tag 'do not revive' on its toe.

In this new reality, bootstrapped self-finance and early commercialisation fuel development. However, for many of the most successful companies venture capital has provided a crucial supplement to these, accelerating growth and allowing companies to take the sort of risks that self-financing often precludes. Some $2.1bn of this sort of finance was raised in 2009 and 2010 alone but, a closer look at the data reveals a stark reality; that Europe not only lags a long way behind North America but has seen its share of global investment collapse in recent years compared to the US, Asia and the rest of the world. For this month's column I want to delve into this, explore why it has happened and what the implications are.

SOMETHING VENTURED

Between 2000 and 2008, privately held games companies in Europe raised some $830m of venture capital financing (20 per cent of the global total), second to North America (primarily the USA) whose $2.9bn represented 69 per cent, and well ahead of Asia and ROW (11 per cent). For the network gaming boom years of 2009 and 2010, North America consolidated its lead with 81 per cent of total finance raised, Asia/ROW grew to 12 per cent and Europe collapsed to just seven per cent.

Given that Europe represented over 30 per cent of the global games software market in 2010, why does it punch so far below its weight with VC investment?

For a start, Europe generally invests less than the USA. Although Europe houses a large and active VC community of over 700 firms that invested €3.5bn across all sectors last year, the USA's 800 VC firms invested a remarkable $22bn in the same period (source: EVCA, NVCA).

This investment chasm undoubtedly reflects on the territories' respective games investment stats and can itself be attributed to several factors; significantly smaller average fund and deal sizes in Europe, and, I would argue, a greater level of risk aversion inherent to European investors.

> ***"There appears to be a vicious cycle in Europe: underinvestment leading to underperformance which contributes to underinvestment."***

For the games sector specifically, there are a number of additional factors behind Europe's under-performance. The paucity of major stock market listed games companies in Europe compared to Asia and the USA means many VCs will see their only viable exit via a trade sale – in contrast to the IPO potential of other sectors – which in turn reduces the likelihood of investment. This also contributes to another problem in Europe; ignorance about the global and in particular local games sector as investors have less actual company – and market – intelligence with which to compare prospective investments.

Truth be told, Europe has a history with a number of terrible games company investments and although the US market has also suffered from failed investments, it would appear European investors have been more easily deterred by these past failures.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Thanks to its multitude of different cultures and languages, Europe is clearly a more difficult market in which to scale a games company. Although based on anecdotal evidence only, I would also suggest that European games companies themselves can be more conservative than their US counterparts, less prone to take risks and less willing, as a result, to incorporate third party finance in their growth plans.

The implications of this relative under-investment could be profound. VC funding has helped developers retain control of their own creative direction, intellectual property and, ultimately, commercial destinies.It has encouraged risk-taking, spurred the creation of new games markets and propelled start-ups to market leading positions, often overtaking companies reliant on organic growth alone.

Europe is strong in one corner of the network games market, browser MMOs, but comparatively weak in most other; particularly mobile and social where, with a tiny number of exceptions, investors have few European candidates to choose from, with the top 100 leader boards dominated by North American and Asian companies.

There is clearly a virtuous circle in the US where investment has led to growth and successful exits which have encouraged further investment.

In contrast there appears to be a vicious cycle in Europe: underinvestment leading to underperformance which contributes to underinvestment.

Europe clearly has the potential to create new global games powerhouses, but to date it has rarely realised that potential. Breaking this vicious cycle is therefore critical for Europe's future.

This will only be achieved gradually as more successful exits – or other incentives such as tax breaks – encourage more investment, and as more European games companies enter new markets and, like their US counterparts, plan growth around VC finance.

Nick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries. **www.gamesinvestor.com**

//COMMENT: DESIGN

Taxation as a tool

by **David Braben**, Frontier Developments

TAXATION has been used as a tool by governments through the ages to encourage particular types of behaviour, and to discourage others. Trouble is, when it comes to government, it seems to be deeply broken. I've taken just three examples where taxation works against the high tech industries, but there are many more.

RELOCATION TAX

Our industry is quite a mobile one. Indeed, as I write this, I'm sure there are many developers looking to relocate from Australia to find work elsewhere given the recent closures of studios over there. Even within the UK, it is not unusual to have to move to follow a job – though since about 2003 this has been taxed hugely – a one-off tax of £12,000 on a typical three bedroom house outside Cambridge, for each such relocation.

Given the already large cost of moving, this is a block to many people relocating, especially if they have families, whether they are coming from Australia or elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Some unlucky individuals have had to do this for several years in a row – and as such this is an unmanageable burden.

Of course, this tax is not called a relocation tax, but that is what stamp duty on primary homes amounts to - it would be easy to fix by simply taxing the uplift in value (if any), or restricting it based on distance – or even not charging stamp duty on people's primary homes. Another way of looking at it is there is a tax break for not relocating.

> ***"Legislation is so decoupled from cause and effect – and more often than not it is the result of lobbying rather than rational consideration."***

TAX ON UK MANUFACTURERS

Manufacturing in the UK has reduced hugely over recent decades, and this would be a great trend to reverse. Differential taxation is a way this could be encouraged, but at the moment it works in the opposite direction – it pays to manufacture abroad.

I'm not talking about wages or working practises, but tax. As an example – relevant for Raspberry Pi – if computer hardware is manufactured in the UK, the manufacturer pays a lot more tax. That is because, assuming the basic components are still imported, they attract import duty, but the completed device does not. Frankly this seems bonkers to me. So companies effectively get a tax break if they manufacture abroad.

During the development of Disneyland Adventures some of the work was outsourced overseas to save on costs

TAX ON UK EMPLOYMENT

We are just about to release *Disneyland Adventures* with Microsoft and Disney on Kinect, and as part of this process we 'outsourced' an amount of the work overseas. Australia too has now – perhaps belatedly – announced tax breaks for our industry, meaning the UK is one of the few remaining places in the world that does not have some sort of favourable government tax treatment similar to film.

Again, it currently amounts to a tax break for doing what is bad for the UK – sending work to the rest of the world. Taken together with, for example, the 37 per cent direct salary subsidy in Montreal, this is a very uneven playing field.

THE POINT?

The cynic would ask; what the point is of writing a piece like this?

Well, perhaps it is surprising, but more often than not people in government do not appreciate the effect some of their decisions have. Legislation is so decoupled from cause and effect – and more often than not it is the result of lobbying rather than rational consideration. Typically the result of a piece of legislation does not manifest itself until a future government is in place.

There are occasions where the taxation system works more helpfully – like the R&D tax credits – but overall it is way too complex and too payroll oriented. The term 'tax breaks' has been made to feel like a hand-out, when what it should really be is an instrument of differential taxation to encourage beneficial behaviour.

My hope is that someone in government reads this, and appreciates that changes can be revenue-neutral, or even raise revenue in the surprisingly short term. We have a taxation scheme that encourages many of the wrong things, much like the 'window tax' a few centuries ago backfired with bricked up windows across the UK.

It can be improved very easily; we should give it a try.

David Braben is the founder of Frontier Developments. Best known as the co-creator of *Elite*, Braben has contributed to a number of other projects including *Frontier: Elite II*, *Thrillville*, *LostWinds* and *Kinectimals*. **www.frontier.co.uk**

//COMMENT: STUDIO MANAGEMENT

Developers are from Mars, Publishers from Venus

by **Tim Heaton**, The Creative Assembly

Heaton's time with EA taught him to understand the publisher-developer relationship from both sides of the divide

RELATIONSHIPS are hard. You have to work at them, be understanding, sometimes give unconditional love, and tackle difficult issues with bravery and dignity. Some are storm ; some are deep and long lasting.

And that's just the relationships between developers and publishers. Don't ask me about those people who inhabit your life when you're not at work – that's an even deeper mystery.

The connection between developers and publishers is the great, largely unwritten, story of video game history. It makes the headlines sometimes when there's a particularly nasty falling-out and it goes to court, or someone goes bust, but most of the time it's entwined in the day-to-day way the business runs. I've been lucky enough to see the business from both sides.

My heart is in development, but my time spent at Electronic Arts opened my eyes to understanding how publishers work, the difficult decisions they need to make, and what's important to them. It changed my perception of how projects and relations should be managed.

I don't think things change significantly if you're an independent studio or owned by a publisher. In general it seems that projects are still managed in similar ways. If you're self-publishing you're in a different position of course, and the death of publishers has long been suggested, but I don't see that happening. It could be argued that because of rising development costs and the difficulty in discovery across the social and mobile sectors, sugar daddies with access to investment money, and the power to build and control infrastructures and global marketing, will be as key to success as they were in the retail-only days.

SECURING INFLUENCE

In dealing with a developer, the publisher's overriding need is to feel secure. It's often making a huge bet on the game being made, and will do everything it can for assurance that it will get what it's paying for. Senior executives at a publisher stake their careers on projects they cannot closely control. So, obviously, a significant part of the role of the publisher is auditing the developer prior to a greenlight, and monitoring progress throughout development.

> ***"The most important and successful strategy for a developer is to manage communications up into the higher echelons of the publisher."***

It seems to me that doing due diligence on a developer prior to a deal is really easy. It depends on one simple component: track record. I would suggest that in games development, you're likely to get projects done at quality thresholds and delivery dates in a similar fashion to those that the key staff on the project have achieved before. Of course there are exceptions, but in a world of complex, disruptive issues, if it were my money, I'd be spending it on people who have hit my expectations before. If you're working with a 70 per cent average Metacritic team and wanting 85 per cent, you really have to understand what needs to change.

The least important part of due diligence prior to the greenlight? The high-level concept. Sure, the game needs to fit into a publisher's portfolio, and be in a broad genre where the publisher feels it can succeed. But beyond that, successful games are all about the detailed implementation, and not the high-level concept. Most games change direction significantly during pre-production, and often in production too. There's no point obsessing on a concept at an early stage if you're entering a relationship where the creative staff at a developer have shown their capability previously.

GOING GREEN

Once the game is greenlit, the day-to-day relationship is all about trust, hitting milestones, communicating issues and demonstrating an understanding of the objectives. In addition, the most important and successful strategy for a developer is to manage communications up into the higher echelons of the publisher. Week-to-week communications often happen with a 'publishing producer', who then reports back up the organisation. But usually publishers will also have internal review sessions, often quarterly, where the real decision-makers at the company want to see and hear that their big bets will pay off.

These are a huge opportunity, and should be taken very seriously. If it's not quarterly reviews it may be 'royal visits', when the publishing chiefs visit, or specific milestones that will be reviewed at a high level.

These reviews need to create a buzz. The internal excitement at a publisher about a game is vital, and it's importance often underestimated. All the best staff want to be associated with a success, and in these days of focused portfolios, marketing support will evaporate if there's no will for it to succeed. If you have heads of marketing and production leaving a meeting going 'Wow, it looked really good', and then sitting on a plane with the CEO saying the same thing, you've succeeded.

There's a lot more to say about good practice between developers and publishers, so hopefully it's a topic to come back to soon. But try not to disappoint or fall out with your publisher – currently, in games development, there really aren't plenty more fish in the sea.

Tim Heaton is studio director at The Creative Assembly, the UK-founded studio behind the acclaimed *Total War* series of PC games, as well as numerous other works including original and licensed products. **www.creative-assembly.co.uk**

//COMMENT: MOBILE

Fixing Games Education

by **Will Luton**, Mobile Pie

IN 2009 I graduated from one of the UK's first game design courses: BA (Hons) Computer Games Design at University of Huddersfield. Just over two and a half years later and I'm a director at one of Europe's most successful mobile game studios, have won awards and am now writing this, here.

Yet despite this I believe, as a graduate and now an employer, that institutions offering games-related course are failing our industry.

This was bolstered in February this year when Ian Livingstone and Alex Hope (a visual FX luminary) published a report called Next Gen via NESTA.

The report finds that only 12 per cent of graduates from games courses find a job in the industry within six months of graduating. This is especially pronounced in design degrees, such as mine, where the figure drops down to 8.8 per cent. Meanwhile 58 per cent of employers, including us, report difficulties filling positions with recruits straight from education.

There is seemingly a simple conclusion: The jobs are there, but the system doesn't equip graduates to get them. Games education is broken at most institutions.

There are lots of symptoms of this breakdown, the most pronounced of which is irrelevant, misguided and unfocused content. My personal belief is that this has been caused by a lack of industry-experienced academics and a strong profit focus in vocational universities.

PURELY ACADEMIC

On top of this the academic tools of critical theory in games studies, although improving, are early and lacking. It's understandable when considering those most qualified to form them are attracted by the conditions in practice over academia.

Yet there is a system in which knowledge is imparted and students are empowered: the work placement.

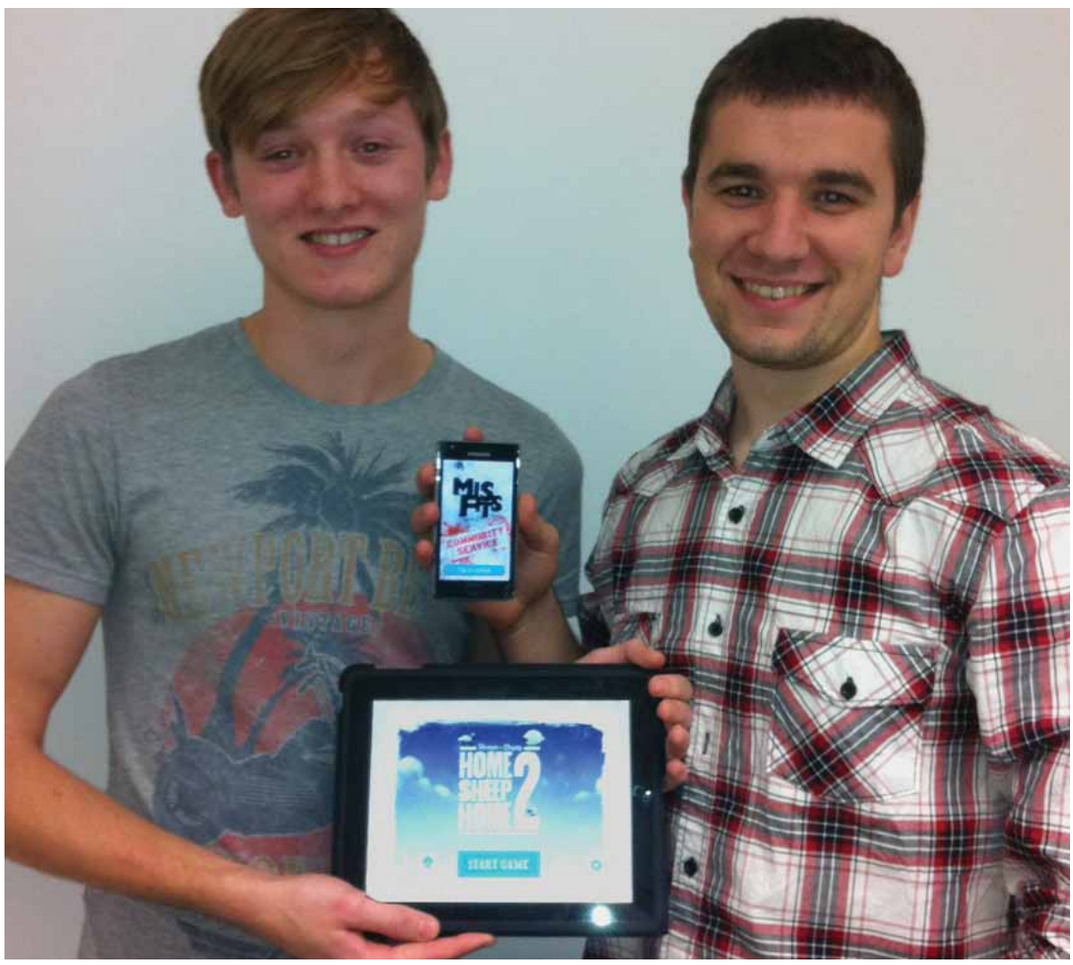
I took 12 months at Sega Europe. Initially in the QA team, I nagged and pleaded out and in to a production role. For four or five months I got to see how the publishing machine worked from the inside. I saw how deals were structured, visited world-class studios and worked with every department from marketing to legal.

When I returned for the final year of my degree, I had more relevant knowledge than the majority of the degree's staff and an abundance of confidence.

Here at Mobile Pie we currently have two QA interns, Dave and Valentine, who are being exposed to what we do: Hearing and seeing production as well as getting hands on with more than just testing.

Dave has been writing developer commentaries for an upcoming title and created a project status board for our new office whilst Valentine is taking up coding duties for live projects.

They are gaining real practical experience and life skills which they would not have in an insular games education. It will make them employable in the future and gives them something they can be proud of now.



Mobile Pie QA interns Dave and Valentine are getting hands on experience of the industry by working on the studio's upcoming projects

> ***"When I returned for the final year of my degree, I had more relevant knowledge than most of the degree's staff and an abundance of confidence."***

PEER REVIEW

I believe work placements just work: Of my peers, those that took placements invariably went on to industry jobs.

Unfortunately, work placements are in extremely short supply because many question the financials in an ever competitive and squeezed job market.

If the UK government is to start offering benefits to the games industry, I would want to see it going to support young talent getting real world experience – currently the government gives up to 100 per cent funding for apprenticeships – then to support their first year's employment or setting up on their own as graduates.

I'm of the strong belief that is how growth can be accelerated. Yet with the country disintegrating under the weight of it's own debt and a regressive public spending policy, I'll assume it's a request that is futile.

We need a new generation in games and the education system is faltering. Offering placements is offering someone their chance to take a tentative step in to an industry that they can inherit and shape.

Will Luton is creative director at the award-winning boutique studio Mobile Pie. They create delicious own IP and work on licenses, with a partner list that includes the BBC, Orange and Hewlett-Packard. Follow Will on Twitter at @will_luton, or visit **www.mobilepie.com**

THE MONTH AHEAD

A look at what December and January has in store for the industry and beyond

DECEMBER 16th
Just Sing Volume 2. Time to break out the karaoke at Christmas and ruin your family's favourite songs.

DECEMBER 25th
Christmas. Time to relax, open your presents and then not get to use them all day to socialise with the family.

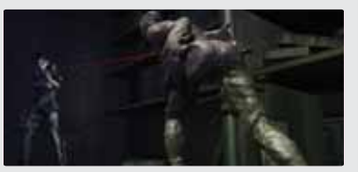
JANUARY 17th to 18th
GameOn: Finance 2012. Connecting the games industry's leading players to new business opportunities.

JANUARY 25th to 26th
Mobile Games Forum 2012. Bringing the latest trends and developments in the mobile space.

DECEMBER 20th
Star Wars: The Old Republic. Wield your lightsabre and take on the galaxy in Bioware's huge MMO.

JANUARY 1st
New Year's Day. Time to nurse those hangovers and believe you'll carry out your New Year's resolutions.

JANUARY 21st
Compass Cup. Apparently Australia's "only cow race". We're not surprised, yet somewhat intrigued.



JANUARY 27th
Resident Evil: Revelations. Zombies, or whatever they are now, come to the DS, in disgustingly in-your-face 3D.

DECEMBER 24th
Christmas Eve. Time to panic and buy those last minute presents because you didn't have time before.

JANUARY 10th to 13th
International Consumer Electronics Show. The famous technology exhibition showcasing new innovations.

JANUARY 23rd
Chinese New Year. Apparently it's tradition to clean the house to sweep away ill fortune. P-A-R-T-Y.

JANUARY 27th
The Sims 3: Master Suite Stuff. More new items to decorate your sims houses with, just because.

DEVELOP DIARY

Your complete games development event calendar for the months ahead

CLOUD GAMING EUROPE
January 17th to 18th
London Hilton, UK
www.cgconfeurope.com

The Cloud Gaming Europe conference has been designed to bring members of the industry up to date on the latest developments in the emerging sector and its potential for the future of gaming.

Speakers at the event are to include Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli (*above*), Gaikai boss David Perry and Square Enix worldwide tech director Julien Merceron.

Talks will discuss monetisation strategies, how developers can access new demographics and how to choose the right platform.

JANUARY 2012

INTERNATIONAL CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW
January 10th to 13th
Las Vegas, USA
www.cesweb.org

GAMEON: FINANCE 2012
January 17th to 18th
Ontario, Canada
gameonfinance.com

CLOUD GAMING EUROPE
January 17th to 18th
London, UK
www.cgconfeurope.com

MOBILE GAMES FORUM 2012
January 25th to 26th
London, UK
www.mobilegamesforum.co.uk

FEBRUARY 2012

CAROLINA GAMES SUMMIT
February 4th
North Carolina, USA
www.carolinagamessummit.com

CASUAL CONNECT EUROPE
February 7th to 9th
Hamburg, Germany
europe.casualconnect.org

DICE SUMMIT 2012
February 8th to 10th
Las Vegas, USA
www.dicesummit.org

MIDLANDS MCM EXPO
February 18th
Telford, UK
www.midlandsmcmexpo.com

MARCH 2012

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE
March 5th to 9th
San Francisco, USA
www.gdconf.com

INDEPENDENT GAMES FESTIVAL
March 5th to 9th
San Francisco, USA
www.igf.com

APRIL 2012

THE GADGET SHOW LIVE
April 11th to 15th
Birmingham, UK
www.gadgetshowlive.net

MAY 2012

NORDIC GAME 2012
May 23rd to 25th
Malmo, Sweden
nordicgame.com

JUNE 2012

E3 EXPO
June 5th to 7th
Los Angeles, USA
www.e3expo.com

ANATOMY OF A BLOCKBUSTER

Our monthly dissection of a recent hit game

Dead Island

PUBLISHER: Deep Silver
DEVELOPER: Techland
FORMAT: PS3, Xbox 360, PC
www.deadislandgame.com

THE SENSATION

Zombie slayer *Dead Island* rose to notoriety when the infamous Axis Animation-produced trailer for the game was released.

Unsettling, glossy and cinematographically slick, the promotional video for the game has clocked in over nine million views on Youtube, and until *Dead Island's* release, courted more press attention than the actual game itself.

Then there was the moment the gameplay videos that debuted looked a little too dissimilar to the trailer, prickling consumers and industry members. Next came the accidental release of the developer code on Steam in place of the final game, and those damning review scores. Whatever people were saying about *Dead Island*, they were saying it a lot, and the world was fascinated. The game itself had garnered all the attention again, and on the week of release, it took the number one spot in countries across the globe.

THE GAME

Set on a tourist paradise – if your idea of paradise is spending time on an island populated by biologically identical bikini models and grotesque male stereotypes – *Dead Island* is a first-person hack n' slash. It's an unusual concept, but it is good fun.

The general critical consensus on *Dead Island* was that despite being bug riddled, filled with contradictions and apparent mistakes, it was thoroughly enjoyable. If it proved anything, it was that you didn't need perfection to entertain an audience and make a lot of money.

THE STUDIO

The outfit behind *Dead Island* is Polish studio Techland, which most famously created western *Call of Juarez* and off road racer *Nail'd*. The company, which started out as a software distributer in 1991, moved into development at the turn of the millennium, and, it is fair to say, has had the opportunity to grow familiar with mixed reviews.

UNIQUE SELLING POINT

There's a few. The whole concept of a 'first person hack n' slash' is relatively unique, and the idea of taking the Romero-style zombie romp to a paradise island is a fresh one. But ultimately there is one thing that is truly *Dead Island's* unique selling point; infamy.

This is the game that has divided reviewers and shoulder barged the idea of 'it's so good it's bad' into a parallel dimension. It shocked the media and the world with an ultraviolent trailer that saw a father murder his own infected child, and stormed the charts when nobody expected it to go anywhere. *Dead Island* is a name that will live on in video game culture, and as a result Techland has an IP on its hands with enormous potential, provided that its infamy doesn't affect the franchise's future.

WHY IT WORKS

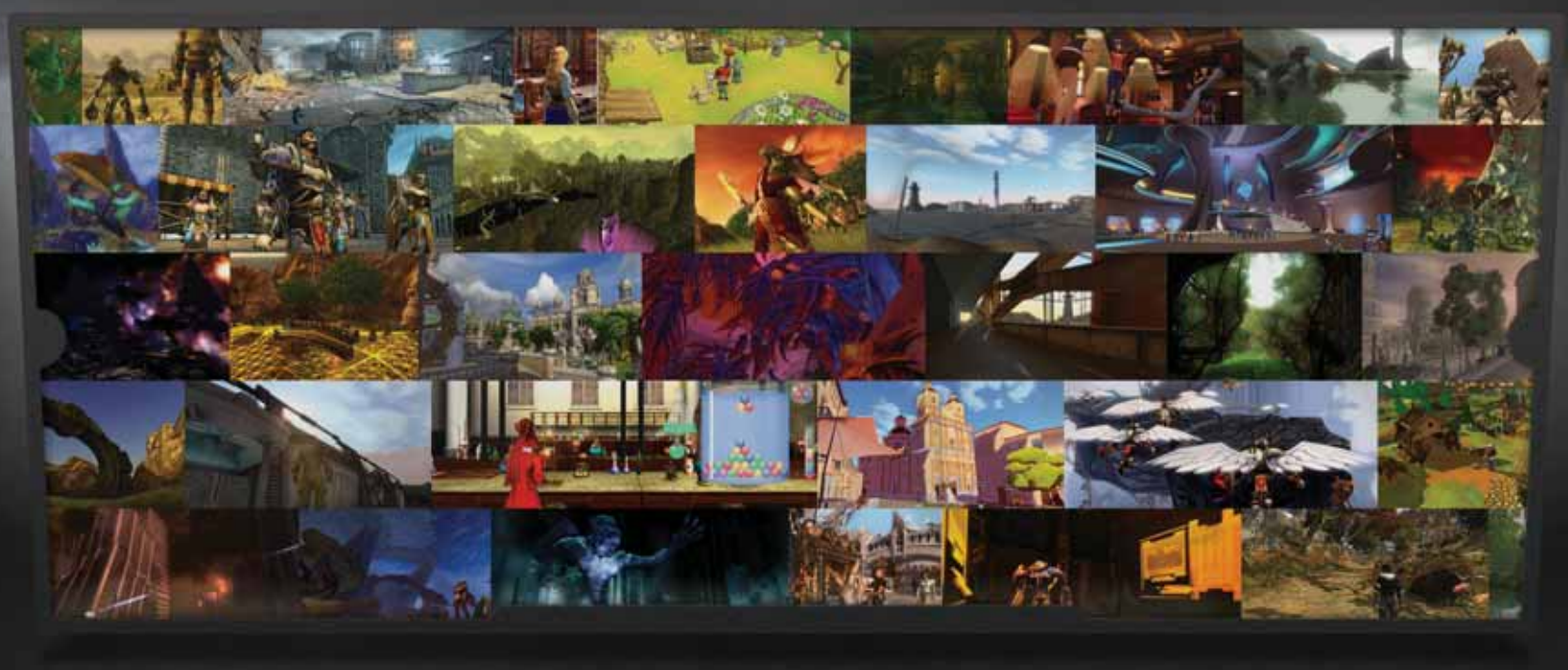
The reason *Dead Island* works is because despite its many flaws, it's really good fun, and distinct enough from its shuffling crowd of rivals. The density of the crowds of undead is refreshingly light, the setting varied and expansive, and the button bashing sensation of pummelling zombies to pieces rewarding. From a technical perspective there is more wrong with the game than right. But while it's easy to shrug off the failings with an aloof smirk, the positives are the core ones; the gameplay is good, and the concept is sound.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Don't be afraid to make the video game equivalent of a B-movie, as long as you've got the budget for a very tidy trailer. Sure, you want to make something universally praised, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have the confidence to break the rules.

Focus on gameplay, and it appears that the consumer that pays your bills might just forgive you, even if the rest of game is… well… not conventional.

Despite its infamy, notorious bugs and unusual gameplay decisions, Dead Island succeeded in charming audiences globally



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BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

"Some investors have been burned."

p45

Money well spent?

Ustwo's game development newcomers speak about spending £150,000 on their first iOS game, Whale Trail, p18

30 Under 30: Our talent spotlight

p23

opm jobs.com

The changing role of game acting

p34

Rebellion: East & West combined

p42

Blazing a Trail

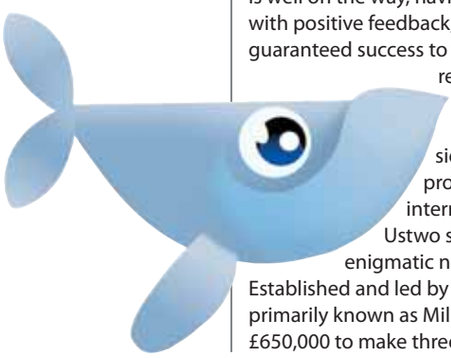
Having never made a game before, design studio Ustwo spent £150,000 making a 69p app called Whale Trail. What were they thinking, asks **Will Freeman**

WHEN LONDON-BASED design studio Ustwo set out to make iOS game *Whale Trail*, it took a big risk.

How big? The game's budget hit £150,000.

And the gamble didn't stop with a daring financial plan for a title that would, like so many other drops in the App Store ocean, retail for 69p. Ustwo, which typically works on branded apps and user experiences for high profile clients like Sony and Intel, devoted an astonishing 1,500 man-hours and a sizeable chunk of its studio headcount to developing *Whale Trail*, in spite of the fact that it isn't a game developer by trade.

What's more, at least 300,000 sales will be needed for the game to edge into profitability; no easy feat in the unpredictable App Store. At time of writing, it is well on the way, having been festooned with positive feedback, but *Whale Trail* is not guaranteed success to the point that it will return on its investment.



In fact, the cheerful side-scroller is the third production from an internal collective of ten Ustwo staff that go under the enigmatic name of CWA. Established and led by the Ustwo co-founder primarily known as Mills, CWA was granted £650,000 to make three titles over a year, with *Whale Trail* serving as the final, most high profile project.

"CWA stands for 'Content With Attitude'. I mean, that's just so bad," admits Mills, real name Matt Miller, who is the kind of character who could easily mean 'good' when he says 'bad'. "We were coming up with the worst name we could, and when we got to that we decided we had to have it as our name. I mean, come on; Content With Attitude? It's just dreadful."

> ***"The whole thing was set up on the premise that if we don't make any money it's not going to break the business."***
>
> Neil McFarland, Ustwo

That kind of playful, self-deprecating remark is typical of Mills, and of Ustwo as a company. As an organisation, it is also hugely transparent, happily making sales figures public, be they good or bad. Mills doesn't appear to mind ruffling feathers with remarkably frank opinions, and inside the walls of Ustwo's hip East London home in the Tea building – which also houses Moshi Monsters outfit Mind Candy – a hugely talented team project a sense of eccentricity that somewhat contradicts their austere work ethic.

CONTENT WITHOUT PRESSURE

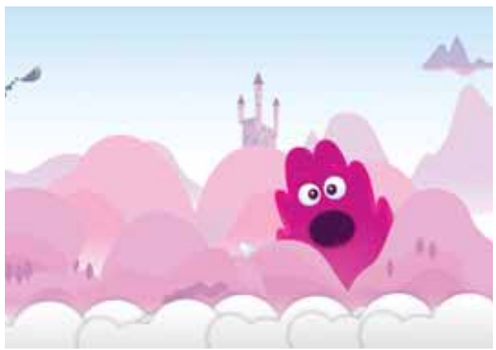
The CWA's enviable annual budget was written off from the start. There is no need for the collective's output to turn a profit, and it is free from the confines of client-based work. Quite simply, if the games and apps it makes flop commercially, it really doesn't matter.

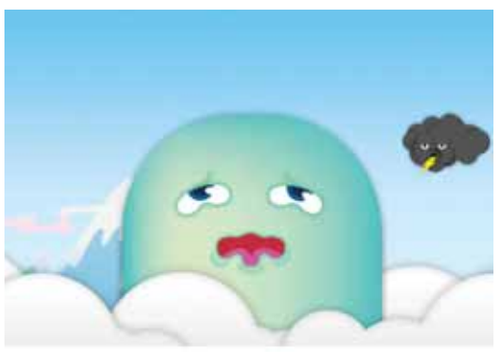
So what's the point? Why pour so much money, time and talent into what cynics might well suggest is a self-indulgent vanity project?

"There's never been that pressure on us to make money," confirms Ustwo 'idea engineer' Neil McFarland, in an attempt to answer that most pressing question.

"The whole thing was set up on the premise, which is true, that if we don't make any money, it's not going to break the business. That gave us a real chance to make the best quality releases we can, free from that kind of constraint of having to make money back on it.

"If you're a small studio that's a big worry, and if it was about making a profit, we wouldn't have taken this chance. The CWA work has been a real eye-opener too, and I don't think we would have been able to put in the quality in that we did, because we'd





Whale Trail's polished look comes courtesy of Ustwo's history as a design studio

have less ability to take risks if it was about making money."

So *Whale Trail* and its forbearers have given Ustwo a chance to flex its creative muscle, learn important lessons about owned IP, and flesh out ideas that may be hard to realise in a client work context. But that's just the beginning of the CWA's task. Their real goal is to serve the wider company.

If successful, *Whale Trail* could provide significant exposure for Ustwo, securing more client work, and making more money in the long term than even generous app sales alone could do over many months.

Mojang Specifications and Rovio are establishing themselves as perhaps the coolest companies of the technological elite, and have undoubtedly earned the luxury of turning down biz dev offers that most creative organisations can only dream of.

If *Whale Trail* can propel Ustwo into that kind of league, suddenly £150,000 doesn't seem like all that much to pay.

ONCE UPON A TIME

The CWA story actually starts with two different apps; *Nursery Rhymes* and *Papercut*. The former, which cost £60,000 to make, allows users to read stories to loved ones remotely. Despite critical acclaim, it only made £24,048 in revenue. *Papercut*, meanwhile, offers a suite of interactive short stories. Again, it was praised a momentous amount, but didn't sell as well as its creators feel it deserved.

"After *Nursery Rhymes* and after *Papercut* – which both got great critical acclaim and lots of love from Apple – we had to look at things carefully," says Mills. "The actual reach was something like 30,000 people for *Nursery Rhymes*. That's a bit disappointing when you've put so much effort into something. The problem there was that the amount of people that actually want to buy apps for their children is pretty small. Games in general though; that's a huge market."

And so, in spite of Ustwo's complete inexperience in game development, it was decided that work would begin on a game. The focus from day one was on something casual and accessible, and the core concept was conceived using techniques familiar to the studio's staff who worked on animation, design and story writing. Quickly the look and character was established, and *Whale Trail's* protagonist Willow – who it can't help be noticed happens to be perfectly formed for plush toys and merchandise – emerged.

"Out naivety about making games is what made it so fun," insists Mills. "We'd never made a game before. Personally speaking, looking at all the games coming out on the App Store, I didn't see that much quality in terms of games, and they weren't really exciting me.

"A lot of developers have been off chasing that hunt for freemium bullshit, and I think they lost their minds a bit. While they were devoting themselves to that, we were just concentrating on making something nice. We're not games makers and we're not going to go with some fad like 8-bit pixel art bullshit; we're just going to make something truly special using our guys who make incredible stories."

A WHALE OF A TIME

And apparently, a lack of game development experience isn't a major hurdle. On its first day, after months of promoting and stimulating word-of-mouth hype on Twitter and other social networks, *Whale Trail* shifted an impressive 6,500 units. The same week, Willow took her place in Apple's Game of the Week slots in 87 countries.

SIZE MATTERS

Ustwo co-founder Mills isn't afraid to admit that making *Whale Trail* – which cost the company £150,000 – would probably have come in at at least three times less if it was produced by a microstudio or bedroom.

In the end, the game was developed by a ten-strong internal Ustwo team, known as the CWA, who invested 1,500 hours into the game's production. That's all very impressive, but why spend so much, especially in the current financial climate?

"The fact is, we just can't do it any cheaper," explains 'idea engineer' Neil McFarland (*far right*). "It's expensive for a company like us to do anything because of our size. And that's not the only factor. With so many of us in the CWA not devoted to our usual client work, the rest of the Ustwo staff have to make even more money."

But, say Mills (*right*) and McFarland, the size that brings about the cost is also the very reason it is worth spending such a vast sum. If *Whale Trail* can succeed in establishing Ustwo as a studio anything like as well known as *Angry Birds* outfit Rovio, then the potential for making vast sums in the future will exceed anything most microstudios could hope for.

Jack and Jill went up the hill.
To fetch a pail of water
Humpty Dumpty
Humpty Dumpty
Did you ever see such a thing in your life as three blind mice?

The CWA has previously attempted to break into the apps market with childrens games Nursery Rhymes and Papercut

Mills is keen to highlight the extent of promotional effort, but like so many before him, he subscribes to the school of thought that the secret of success in the iOS market comes down, first and foremost, to the quality of your game.

"If the product was crap, it wouldn't have done well," offers the man whose job title reads 'Chief Wonka'. "It's hard not to sound like a twat here, but people genuinely seem to like it. And not just mates and people who have to be nice. Wherever we've taken it or sent it, people like *Whale Trail*. It is pretty good, we reckon."

Despite that confidence in Ustwo's latest project, Mills is quick to recognise the huge risk in devoting £150,000 – written off or otherwise – to an idea for a game: "If we just wanted to make money straight up we wouldn't have developed a game."

The efforts of CWA took a significant percentage of Ustwo staff away from the company's more commercial endeavours. Time was sunk into declining the advances of large-scale publishers hungry for a bite of the *Whale Trail* pie, and an obsession with polish soaked up hundreds of those infamous 1,500 man-hours.

Mills admits it was hard for those at Ustwo who worked outside the inner circle of creativity that CWA was becoming. After all, how were the rank-and-file Ustwo staff supposed to feel about a select ten freed from commercial pressure?

However, the reality of the CWA work was far tougher than it may have seemed from those not intimate with the development of *Whale Trail*.

"I don't think we ever got near the point of thinking 'fuck this' and giving up, but there was enormous pressure from us and from the rest of the studio for the game to be a hit," admits McFarland. "Everyone else at Ustwo was working hard making the money for the studio, and that was really quite stressful, even if we're confident as a small team. And the rest of the company don't really know what we're doing in the CWA. They could have thought we were just having a laugh."

> ***"I'd like to spend a million on the CWA next year, which would mean doubling its size. That's where the innovation lies."***
>
> Mills, Ustwo

NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS

Stressful it may have been, but *Whale Trail* is starting to do very well indeed. Mills' dream of selling the game one million times by this Christmas is looking increasingly like it could happen, and the hype continues to mount. Making a profit is looking like a certainty, which in turn is good news for all at Ustwo, because all the extra cash *Whale Trail* raises will be invested back into the studio. In fact, much of it looks destined to be used to create a bigger, better, more attitude-filled CWA.

"If *Whale Trail* doesn't do well financially, that's OK. We're fine with that. But if it does do well financially, next year we'll spend even more money," states a clearly confident Mills. "I'd like to spend a million on the CWA next year, which would mean doubling its size and maybe having 20 people on it. That's where the innovation lies. *Whale Trail* might just do pretty well, but if it does 'millions well', then potentially I guess we could break that out. I'd love it to blossom into something far more substantial than raising awareness."

Some will have written off Ustwo as chancers with too much cash and confidence, but the fact is that every day *Whale Trail* is gaining momentum and sales, and at the current rate, Mills might just have the chance to realise his ambition.

"There's only one thing," he jokes. "We still don't know how to make games."

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30 UNDER 30

The **Develop** talent spotlight is back, picking out the young talent of today on track to become the big games industry names of tomorrow

Trevor Klein
Development Producer, Somethin' Else

At just 26, Klein has developed a reputation with those he works with for having an 'extraordinary' set of creative and technical skills – something rare to see in the same person. Having designed multiplatform projects for the likes of the BBC and Channel 4, and with three iOS titles under his belt, Klein is already at a level typical of those many years his senior. An expert in running rigorous, agile developments, he has constantly demonstrated a strong rapport with clients, all the while matching resource with an expert hand.

Tom Dowding
Co-founder and Technical Director, Mobile Pie

Highly regarded among his colleagues for building water-tight code, 29-year-old Dowding oversees the development of Mobile Pie's internal technology such as the My Engine, all the while keeping a firm hand on the purse strings as company secretary. Furthermore, Dowding has consistently impressed the people he has worked with by demonstrating the insight to see design and creative benefits despite technological difficulties. He has proved crucial in Mobile Pie's success, and big things are expected of his future.

Matt Wieteska
Game Designer and Producer, Six to Start

In his time at Six to Start, Wieteska has proved himself invaluable to the success of some of the studio's most innovative games in the past two years, including serving as producer and lead puzzle designer for ARG and transmedia project *The Code*, and game designer on iPhone project *Zombies, Run*. Educated in English literature and classics, and with a background in theatre, 26-year-old Wieteska has brought a unique skill set to game design that has shown you don't need to be a trained techie to impress your peers and make an impact on the games industry.

Ella Romanos
MD, Remode Studios

As MD of Remode Studios, 27-year-old Romanos has worked tirelessly, travelling the globe to build up an international base of clients, partners and publishers. She has been integral in positioning Remode as a highly regarded young development studio in the competitive mobile and online/web space, and has helped the company secure work with television and toy brands as well as developing original IP. Her programming background, in tandem with her business development skills, has proved invaluable to Remode and the ExPlay conference she co-founded and project manages.

Simon Davis
Producer, Bigpoint

At just 28 years old, Simon has already been involved in the development of over 50 titles, and has contributed in numerous capacities including QA, design and production. Having only joined the video games industry back in 2004 with Babel Media as QAC, he currently serves as producer at Bigpoint in Hamburg, where his contribution to *DarkOrbit* has helped the game attract over 60 million registered users. Praised for his leadership skills, he is cited by several 30 Under 30 nominations as being both popular with colleagues and extremely proactive.

Daniel Kaplan
Business Developer, Mojang Specifications

At 25 years old, Kaplan, or Kappische as he is known to his 41,000-plus loyal Twitter followers, is perhaps the most famous member of the *Minecraft* team besides Markus 'Notch' Persson. As business developer at Mojang Specifications, he has an influential hand on the reigns of a brand that has gone beyond being a sensation, arguably pushing him into the territory of the industry's elite. He's also a very likeable man, and like Persson, is remarkably down to earth despite being part of one of the world's most successful indie games.

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Jennifer Clixby
Producer, Lionhead

Clixby joined Lionhead back in 2004, and has worked in an increasingly senior production role on *Fable II* and *Fable III*. With each new project she has been promoted to the next level and she is now a popular team leader. As one of the most highly regarded producers at Lionhead at just 29, Clixby has impressed the team to the point that she recently presented a Lionhead project to the senior management team at MGS Redmond

Paul Scott Canavan
Lead Artist, Digital Adaptations, Tern Digital

Paul Canavan is, say his employers, an exceptional digital artist. The 25-year-old has taken the reigns of crafting the visual style, storyboarding and painting the first of Tern's *Digital Adaptations*, John Buchan's *The Thirty Nine Steps*. In a very short period of time he has reached a senior position in the company, and is one of the most talented new game developers springing up at the likes of TV production companies.

Dale Scullion
Lead Designer, Ubisoft Reflections

At 28 years old, Scullion has recently stepped up to a lead designer role, and is currently at work on yet-to-be-revealed original IP for a new Kinect game at Newcastle studio Ubisoft Reflections. Having proved his talent and hard work ethic throughout the development of the *Driver: San Francisco* project, Scullion has emerged as one of the most capable and devoted members of a studio brimming with youthful development talent.

John Beech
Level Designer, Media Molecule

Already infamous as 'the man who earned a job playing *LittleBigPlanet*', Beech's rapid journey from builder and Media Molecule fan to respected company employee is remarkable. But he is much more than a staffer with a novel recruitment history. He has emerged as a leading design talent at Media Molecule; so much so that his colleagues have promised to 'eat Sackboy' if the 29-year-old isn't creative director of his own team by the time he's 40.

Steve Hessel
Community Relations Manager, Splash Damage

Joining Splash Damage in 2007 to head up the studio's community efforts for *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, Hessel later oversaw the successful relaunch of the studio's web presence, as well as the community efforts for *Brink*. With 11 years in the industry behind him Hessel – Now 29 years old – previously worked on *Star Trek: Elite Force II* and *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* at a time when the conventions of community management were still being defined.

Richard Tyrer
Senior Designer, Climax Studios

Currently at work on an unannounced triple-A title for a major publisher, Tyrer's role involves running the gameplay team, encompassing character gameplay design, animations, boss encounters, and liaising with code, level design and art. At 28 years old, over the course of five games he's seen his position rise from that of a level designer to a senior designer, and has earned the respect of all of his peers, who say he's destined to be the next Peter Molyneux.

Simon Gibson
Lead Vehicle Artist, Playground Games

Despite his relative youth, Gibson has already worked at an impressive number of high profile studios, including Eutechnyx, Evolution Studios and Ubisoft Reflections, all in his specialism of vehicle design and production. Credited on *Motorstorm: Pacific Rift* and *Driver: San Francisco* among others, the 26-year-old is now at Playground leading the vehicle art team on an unannounced triple-A title, where he has impressed all who work with him.

Michael Barclay
Designer, Crytek UK

An Abertay alumni, 26-year-old Barclay joined the industry in 2007, where he immediately made an impression at Free Radical Design. Having since worked on a launch title for Sony's Move controller at Cohort Studios, and now at Crytek UK, Barclay not only offers impressive design talent, but is devoted to the UK games education system. He has lectured at universities and talked at Dare to be Digital, where he was also a judge.

Mitu Khandaker
Tiniest Shark/University of Portsmouth

The diversity of Khandaker's gaming projects and skills is remarkable. She is presently working with Martin Hollis to research romance in game design, developing a satirical sci-fi life-sim game with indie veteran Cliff Harris, and doing a PhD looking at 'novel interaction mechanisms' in games at the University Of Portsmouth. At 26-years-old, Khandaker also writes, lectures, and runs her own charity helping educate women in Bangladesh.

Peter Bottomley
Senior AI programmer, Bigbig Studios

Highly regarded amongst his colleagues at SCEE studio Bigbig as an unconventional thinker who isn't afraid to challenge existing practices if they need improving, 25-year-old Bottomley has established himself as something of a fledgling visionary. Undaunted by tackling the biggest of challenges, he is Bigbig's resident provider of 'beautiful and elegant' solutions and he is considered one of the studio's most talented members.

Samantha Jane Whale
Marketing and Business Development Executive, Universally Speaking

25-year-old Whale is one of Universally Speaking's most hardworking and dedicated employees who has emerged as something of an ambassador for the IT community. Having formerly served as one of the first professional female gamers in the UK, she has been nominated by all those who work with her for being 'a very creative and intelligent woman' who is destined to go places.

Craig Laycock
Community Manager, The Creative Assembly

Since joining The Creative Assembly, 28-year-old Laycock has become a successful and popular community manager, and through his earnest approach, he's transformed the studio's communications to swell the ranks of – and build a sterling relationship with – the passionate *Total War* fanbase. Having become The Creative Assembly's social networking guru, Laycock has also flown the flag for his employer at events across the globe.

Shams Jorjani
Producer, Paradox Interactive

This year Paradox Interactive is on track for a 90 per cent increase in revenues, and Jorjani has played a key part in helping that growth. Having been deeply involved with the discovery, signing and development of *Magicka*, 28-year-old Jorjani has helped see the game sell over 900,000 copies, establishing himself as one of the outfit's most talented employees. Already, he is well on track for a glittering career in the industry.

Richard Brooks,
Technical Director, Rodeo Games

Described affectionately by colleagues as an 'approachable supercomputer', Brooks cut his teeth on EyeToy projects for Kuju before heading over to Codemasters to help create a brand new game engine. At the age of 27, he co-founded iOS developer, Rodeo Games, and became their technical director. The 28-year-old's first project in that position attained over 500,000 downloads, a Metacritic score of 86 per cent and two Develop Award nominations.

Alistair Aitcheson
Independent Developer

23-year-old Aitcheson has been running his own one-man studio since graduating from University of Warwick with a first class Master's in Mathematics, and has been programming games for over ten years. He handles all the programming, artwork and animation for his games, such as *Greedy Bankers*, and has already become a regular event speaker. One of 2011's youngest 30 Under 30 members, he capably rivals the careers of those many years his senior.

Jon Georgious
Senior Designer, Lightning Fish Games

Having only joined Lightning Fish in March this year as a senior designer on *miCoach* after serving at NaturalMotion, 29-year-old Gorgious has worked extensively across consoles, handhelds and mobile platforms. He has quickly become an extremely valuable member of the design team at Lightning Fish, and has impressed his co-workers to the point that they are confident he will establish himself as an industry benchmark for quality design.

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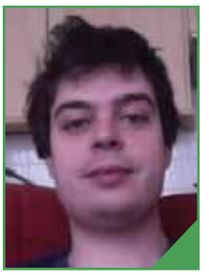
Rolandas Razma
CEO, UD7

Winner of VentureBeat's King of Code award for his innovative games, 28-year-old Razma heads up a studio that has produced some 20 apps for iOS and Android since its inception last year. As one of the most successful talents in the blossoming Lithuanian dev scene, he is popular and respected, and has seen several million downloads from his catalogue of releases, making the UD7 CEO one to watch.

Vincenzo Alagna
CEO, YOUOCO, and Lead Developer, Iwi



Highlighted by several nominees as a brilliant developer with both unique vision and a deep knowledge of the industry, 29-year-old Alagna already boasts ten years in the industry. He currently serves as both CEO of YOUOCO, and lead developer for Iwi. His most impressive achievement, however, is perhaps when he managed to secure a publishing deal within ten minutes of beginning a pitch.

Paddy Murphy
CEO, Open Emotion Studios

Days away from turning 28, Murphy is both the CEO and lead sound designer at Open Emotion Studios. He has overseen the small studio as it has expanded rapidly, growing from a tiny Flash outfit in 2009 to a ten-person team working on PSPmini and Steam projects. As the studio goes from strength to strength, Murphy's regard with colleagues and in the industry is becoming increasingly potent.

Zach Sims
Co-founder, Codeacademy

Along with co-founder Ryan Bubinski, Sims set up Codeacademy, a free online resource that teaches coding with true grace. Remarkably, Sims is just 21, and his increasingly popular creation is democratising game development to a degree that even Unity doesn't offer. At 22, Bubinski deserves equal mention, but thanks to our ruthless 'one entry per studio' rule, Sims gets to see his name in print this time.

Barry Petrie
Studio Director and Co-founder, Digital Goldfish

Having co-founded Digital Goldfish, 29-year-old Petrie has served as studio director as the company has become an increasingly prominent player in the mobile gaming sector. Helping attract high profile IPs and brands to a company that made its name with iOS and Flash hit *Bloons*, Petrie is also part of the reason why Digital Goldfish is one of Scotland's most well-liked studios.

Leo Brennan
Game Developer, Bossa Studios

22-year-old Leo Brennan, his Bossa Studios team mates say, is a highly skilled, solution-driven coder with an exceptional eye for detail. He has proved he is the owner of a bright mind and a natural talent for adapting to high-intensity environments, and his ability to identify key areas for innovation and improvement have made him an essential member of the increasingly high profile studio.

Chris Pickford
Producer, Jagex

Already a seasoned veteran in the games industry, 28-year-old Jagex producer Pickford started out at Bizarre Creations and his first major job was on *Project Gotham Racing*, which won countless awards for his team. Blessed with what his nominees call a 'brilliant refreshing take on the art and psychology of games', he shines at a studio packed full of youthful development talent.

Khaled Al-Hurby
Lead Designer, Adamant Studios

A recent graduate from Abertay University's Game Design and Production Management course, 22-year-old Khaled is the lead designer for Adamant Studios in Dundee, which recently won investment from the Abertay Prototype Fund. Praised for his 'outstanding vision and great commitment'; he is an individual who those close to him believe will make a huge mark on the games industry.

30 UNDER 30 HONOURABLE MENTIONS

This year's 30 Under 30 saw more nominations than ever before, meaning a record number of no less worthy youngsters didn't get a spot in the final 30. Some of those were: **Will Luton**, Mobile Pie, **Tom Jubert**, freelance writer, **Ryan Bubinski**, Code Academy, **Nick Cooper**, Jagex, **Antoine Pastor**, Somethin' Else, **Billy Wimblett**, Lionhead, **Jeff Tanton**, Mediatonic, **Ben Anderton**, Ubisoft Reflections, **Olivier Tardy**, Ubisoft Reflections, **Roman Margold**, Ubisoft Reflections, **Will Campbell**, Ubisoft Reflections, **Sean Crooks**, Ubisoft Reflections, **Tom Boggis**, Ubisoft Reflections, **Ted Timmins**, Lionhead, **Thomas Pollock**, Digital Adaptations, **Michelle Ducker**, Media Molecule, **Chris Cummings**, Media Molecule, and the ranks of Splash Damage's army of youthful talent: **Adam Baines**, **Andrew Quinn**, **Andrew Charles**, **Angelo Dal Pra**, **Arne-Olav Hallingstad**, **Ben Davis**, **Charles Andrew**, **Craig Nelson**, **Dave Edwards**, **David Johnston**, **Eoin O'Grady**, **Gaeton Montaudouin**, **Georgi Simeonov**, **Gordon Biggans**, **Hussein Elgridly**, **Jamie Manson**, **Jeremy Hay**, **Joe Gibson**, **Jonathan Fletcher**, **Laurens Corjin**, **Leanne Cox**, **Mark McDonagh**, **Mark McLeod**, **Paul Greveson**, **Philip Barnell**, **Pierre Tregaro**, **Robert Macdonald**, **Romain Toutain**, **Sean Francis**, **Simon Price**, **Stephen Etheridge**, **Steve Alves**, **Vincent Joyeau**, **William Richens.**

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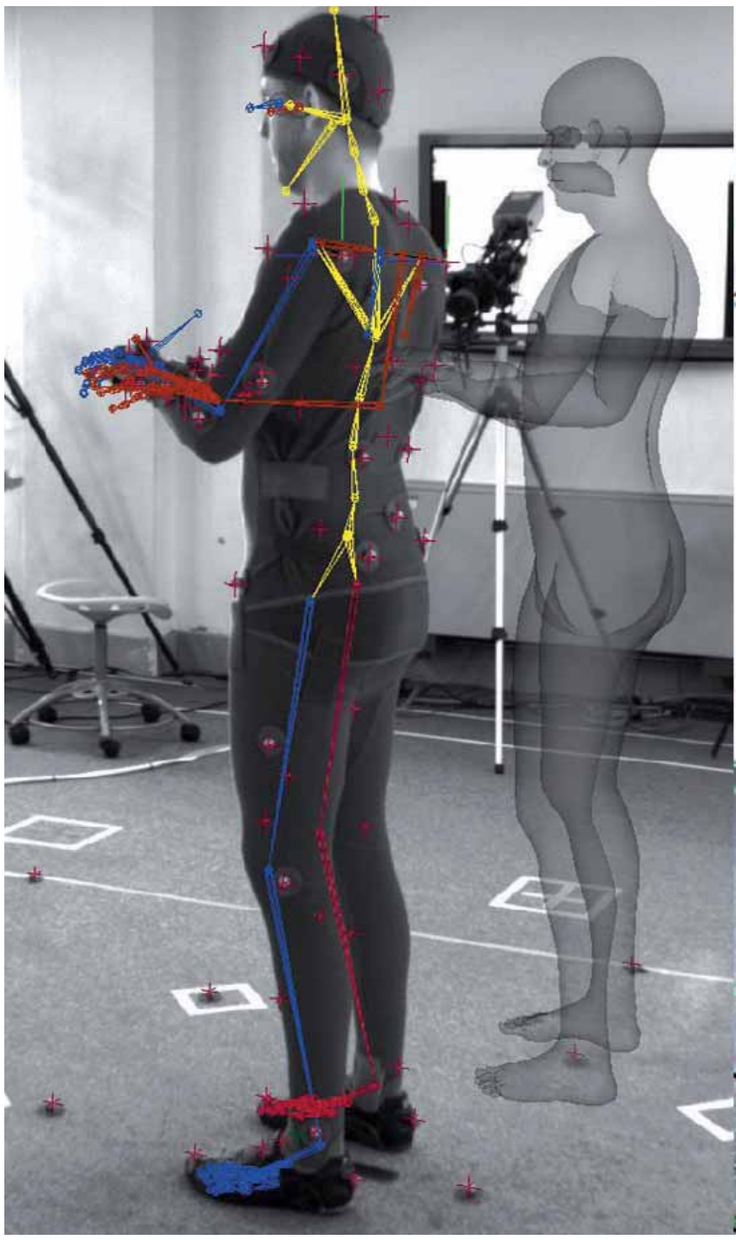
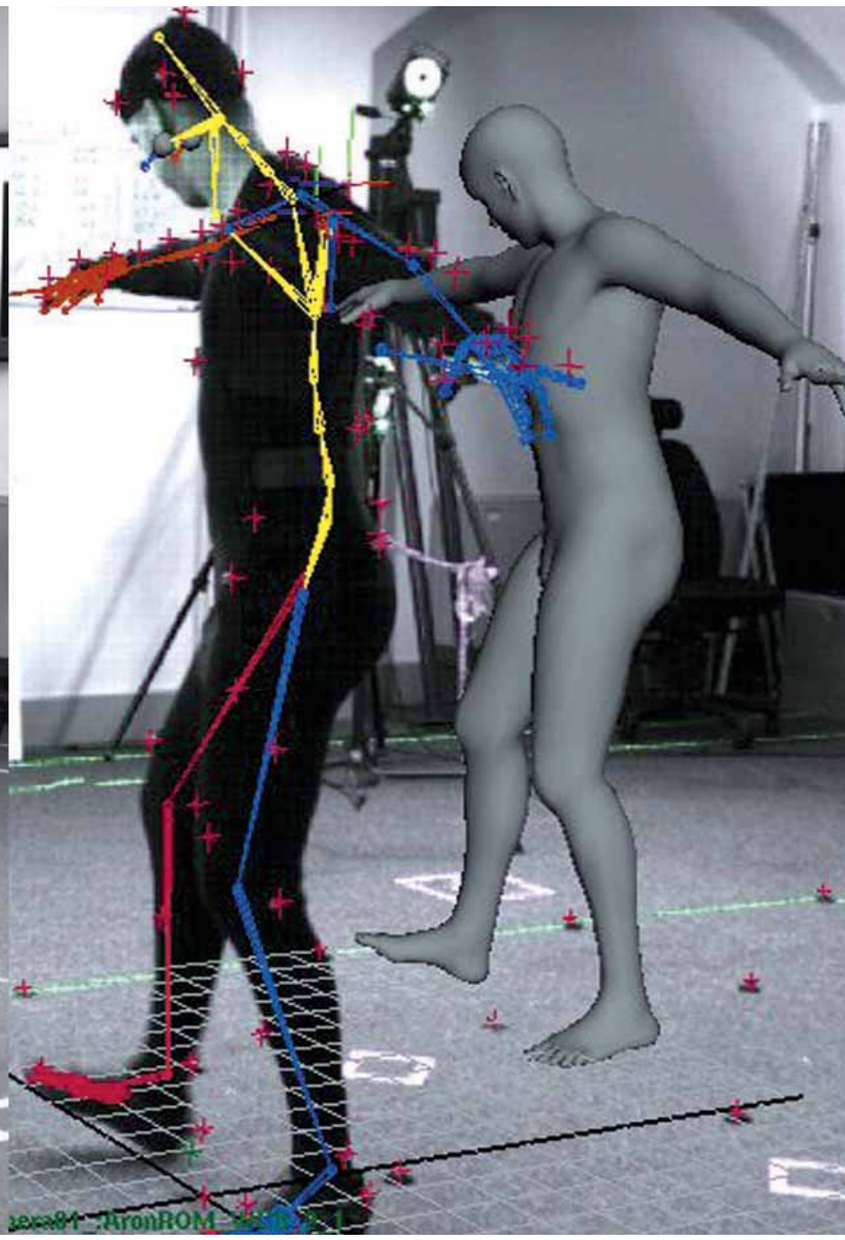




Keeping in Motion

Holding pace with motion capture's furious progress can be tough going. Thankfully **Craig Chapple** has talked with the specialty's finest about where the technology is at and where it will be tomorrow

MOTION CAPTURE technology has come a long way in recent years. Films like *Avatar* are becoming old news, and the likes of Rockstar's ground-breaking *L.A. Noire* has shown that even the current generation of console hardware, with its slower cycle, can continue to push boundaries.

Although the various methodologies motion capture has become are not without their constraints and difficulties, an increasingly democratised technological landscape has ushered in an era of accesibility and affordability.

There are now more pre-visualisation, more alternate capture methods and more cameras at a smaller size that can record ever subtler nuances in an actor's performance. There has also been a move into non-optical capture, including inertial systems and surface capture, as well as the emergence of the virtual camera.

"When I first started using motion capture, there was no pre-visualisation of the motion capture data at all," reminisces James Comstock, VP of Engineering facial animation experts Captive Motion.

BACK IN THE DAY

"We essentially had to build the tools by hand. Now developers can buy systems that will display full body motion capture in real-time and allow them to see exactly what they are getting as the capture is happening."

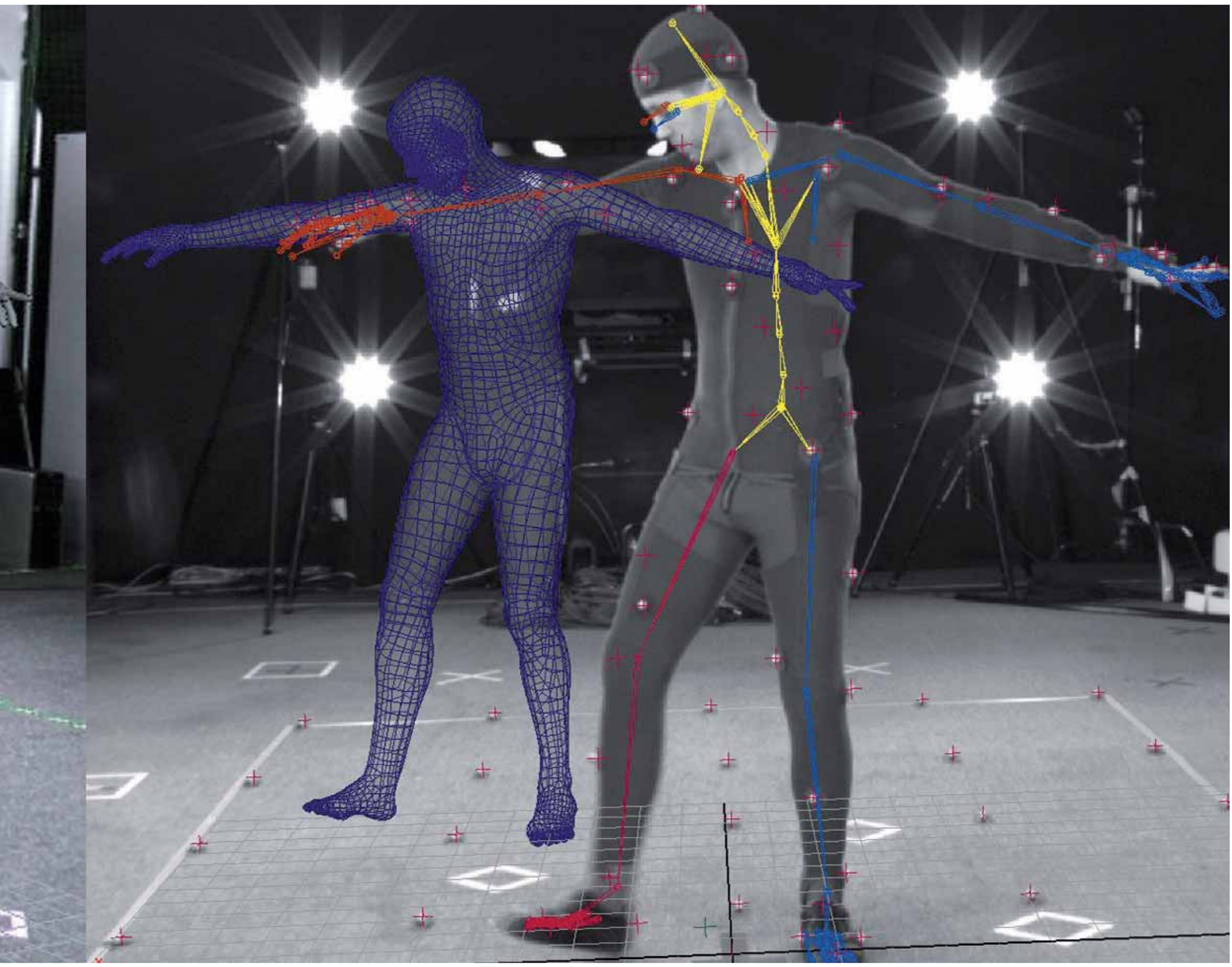
Audiomotion co-founder Mick Morris agrees that mo-cap has changed significantly over the last decade, and at an impressive pace.

"In our 13 years, the tech has improved dramatically from tiny capture volumes, low-res cameras and limited tools for post-production. Today we can utilise over 100 cameras, and capture huge volumes with multiple performers with faces and fingers.

"For Audiomotion this is a result of working very closely with Vicon here in Oxford. Collaborating closely with the engineers, helping them develop cutting edge solutions."

Hein Beute, product manager of Xsens, whose tools were used in Sony's *Killzone 2*, says that the technology has moved on to become more accessible and provide better and faster pipelines.

"Motion capture is getting more accessible to different kinds of users," he suggests. "Ease



of use has improved and because of this it also gets more integrated into production pipelines. Animators see it as a tool that allows them to achieve higher quality animations in less time."

As it currently stands, motion capture has hit a point where cost effectiveness intersects with top quality animation. The technology has become so user friendly that Jim Richardson, president of optical tracking providers NaturalPoint, believes it is no longer just a tool for triple-A developers.

> ***"There is work still to be done to make motion capture the slave of the developer, rather than technology dictating a way of working."***
>
> Phil Elderfield, Vicon

"While our technical approach is similar to that of other optical tracking companies, like Vicon or Motion Analysis, we're marketing systems that are priced to meet an independent budget, but powerful enough to drive triple-A development," he says.

"As affordable new technologies entered the market, forcing prices down, large and small studios alike began adjusting to the reality of motion capture as a key pipeline component. Options now exist for essentially every budget and every type of tracking application."

Phil Elderfield of optical and motion tracking specialists Vicon, however, believes that there is still a lot for the technology to do to be more user and budget friendly.

"There is work still to be done to make motion capture the slave of the developer and the performers, rather than technology dictating a way of working. Mo-cap needs to successfully operate in an environment that reflects game narrative," he says.

As mo-cap technology advances its fidelity, the onus is on actors to perfect their performances, whether using marker-based technology (above), or solutions like Xsens' inertial system (left)

LOCATION, LOCATION

Recalling a conversation with Quantic Dream mo-cap supervisor Steve Olson, Elderfield says that being able to shoot performances on location would be much more cost effective way of animating and offer more realistic movements when the tech is fully realised.

"The mo-cap set is ideal for efficiency, but *Heavy Rain* is real world-based, and there is just a ton of back and forth between modelling and animation over heights of railings and so on," Olson reportedly told Elderfield.

"It would be great to be able to set up a system like a film shoot for a handful of shots. It would save us from having to build ridiculous and expensive sets that are only needed for three seconds."

This is one aspect that currently troubles games animators, and acts as a restraint on capturing the full realism of character movements and emotion. Comstock ▶

Above, (top-to-bottom): Bo Wright from Motion Analysis, Captive Motion's James Comstock, Hein Beute of Xsens, NaturalPoint's Jim Richardson and John Klepper of Imagination Studios

notes there are always issues with expertise and training when using motion capture because of the technical complexity of the process, and this needs to be overcome to provide a more seamless approach to filming.

"We are still a long way from motion capture being as easy as pointing a camcorder at someone and capturing their performance," he states. "However, with depth sensing technologies like we have seen in devices like Kinect, I think we're going to get there sooner rather than later.

"After that, it's going to be less about capturing explicit markers, and more about capturing entire environments, props, clothing and all."

Imagination Studios founder John Klepper says that one of the larger challenges is to provide actors with freedom of movement so they can express themselves, which will in turn, benefit the game.

"A big challenge yet to be adequately overcome is the ability to capture actors without the need for special suits or head mounted cameras, such that one could film in a normal way with normal clothes and simultaneously capture the actors' motion in high resolution."

He adds that TV and film have no such restrictions and continue to progress in the field, even introducing new animation technologies, such as complete facial motion capture and new lighting techniques.

"Future computer animation may bring the effects even closer to perceivable reality," he says.

FREE TO MOVE

Motion Analysis director Bo Wright agrees that one of the biggest limitations in the industry is providing actors more freedom. He argues that too much hands-on tech can prohibit performance.

"I think the biggest limitation is finding a less intrusive way to capture facial motion. Right now the performer has to wear either markers affixed to their face or wear a head-mounted camera rig. Both of them are limiting to the production and performance."

Working with and providing actors and directors with the tools and environments they need is a challenge the industry has taken on, albeit with mixed results. *L.A. Noire* and *Heavy Rain* are examples of how performance capture can be done in the correct way, engaging the player in real emotions, immersing them into the game world, whilst moving the industry forward.

Comstock says that the technology is in fact already here and ready for use, and consoles can easily make use of the fidelity of the animations that can be provided.

"It's time to take really advantage of it," he states. "Of course, with more power comes more responsibility. A bad actor is still going to be a bad actor and a terrible script is going to be terrible no matter how great the characters and animation look."

Morris agrees that acting needs to take on a more important role with developers in future games if studios are to take advantage of current tech and create a believable experience. He also believes that hiring the right director and bringing them in early on

Many developers are looking to movies such as Paul (pictured) to better realise the role of the director in a mo-cap studio

in production is equally essential, as the chemistry between a good actor and director can provide moments too rarely seen in gaming and more often associated with film.

"Casting the right actors and director is crucial," he says. "The chemistry between a good director and the actors on a full performance stage can be amazing; hairs on the back of your neck stuff.

"It's very difficult to do this if they aren't on the stage together, recording everything at the same time. What's the point of re-recording or dubbing when you can capture that magic between director and actor as it happens."

> ***"A bad actor is still going to be a bad actor no matter how great the characters and animations look."***
>
> James Comstock, Captive Motion

Alexandre Pechev, founder of full body solving and animation outfit Ikinema also believes directors need a more integral role in the filming and animation process.

He says by merging pre-visualisation and post-processing together, which requires fast processing and solving on the CG characters in real-time, directors would be able to then work on near-final quality characters.

Whilst there is a need for some developers to recognise the importance of acting and directing, as well as the various technical limitations, there appears to be a unanimous agreement amongst the sector that the slower console cycle has not affected the progress of motion capture, despite dealing with the same hardware.

Elderfield says that the longer lifespan of the PS3, Xbox 360 and Wii has in fact helped motion capture cement a more important role in gaming as costs can go straight into IP, rather than into R&D for new systems.

"I don't think it's prohibiting any advancement in motion capture," he claims. "Contrary to this, I think it has helped developers become more comfortable with what motion capture is capable of right now. As developers become more accustomed to their consoles' power and capabilities, they are more willing to divert resources toward testing how to get more out of their engines, which in turn allows for better animations."

MASTER OF ALL TRADES

Richardson echoes these sentiments, stating that despite the current generation's system having relatively limited real-time capabilities and restricting what can be offered graphically, motion capture is tuned for numerous markets such as robotics, and is in a constant state of development.

"In that way, the gaming market will continue to benefit from the more rigorous demands of the scientific and film markets," says Richardson. "If gaming engines and hardware progress to *Avatar*-like quality, in real-time, motion capture architecture will already be in place to drive those animations."

The Creative Assembly's mo-cap manager Peter Clapperton sums up the situation: "It may be a little known fact in the entertainment industry that one of the largest areas of R&D for motion capture technology is the medical profession, which, as you might imagine, demands absolute precision."

This doesn't mean that there isn't more console manufacturers can do to help. Further advancements in real-time processing and rendering need to be made at both the software and hardware levels to bring the industry closer to film quality, and Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft all need to work with mo-cap studios to make the most of the tech.

"The key notion here is for any developers or console manufacturers to consult more and collaborate more with motion capture studios – at the very basis of any game development," offers Klepper.

Vicon's Elderfield says that developers also need to collaborate more in advance to find out what is possible with mo-cap and perhaps even discover tech they weren't aware of before. He insists that whilst customer feedback often provides a list of specific functionality and detailed workflows, providing the information on the intended end goal would be more useful to animators.

"Tell us what you're trying to achieve and let us find the technology. Ask yourself what are the important areas now, and what will they be in three years time?," suggests Elderfield. "It may be that a particular button or workflow can be completely superseded by a new approach or piece of technology that we have up our sleeve."

Comstock agrees that motion capture studios should be involved in development earlier, adding: "Spend more time working with the facial capture providers to integrate them into their productions. The technology is here and ready for use, and the consoles can easily make use of the fidelity of the animations that can be provided. It's time to take really advantage of it. "

RAISING STANDARDS

Wright believes that developers have also become too comfortable with the progress made on current generation systems, and are reluctant to move on.

"I think we are at a plateau of standardisation where developers have settled into a commoditised world of what motion capture brings to a project and aren't looking to jump in the deep end again. They understand how it fits into their production and budgets, and aren't looking for a new way of doing things right now."

> ***"The need in the future will be on software improvements over the current solvers and retargeting tools."***
>
> Alexandre Pechev, Ikinema

He states, however, that progress in the last two years on presenting characters moving within their environments will "definitely spur on a revolution" in the sector over the next few years.

As for the future, the experts in the mo-cap sector believe progress will be made in a plethora of areas.

Clapperton says the biggest area for progression is in markerless technology. "We're seeing markerless facial mo-cap increasing fast at the moment, and markerless technology has the biggest potential for progression, as it's still in its infancy," he says. "For most however, the costs involved are currently prohibitive compared to the more established technologies such as optical capture."

Richardson echoes these sentiments, further stating that NaturalPoint is anticipating the eventual hybridisation of all technologies, with the best approaches converging and filling the gaps between the current democratised models of mo-cap.

"This could result in a single system that utilises both marker-based and markerless tracking via optical sensors that are combined with inertial, fibre optic, and ultrasonic sensors for added redundancy, accuracy, and tracking range," he explains.

Ikinema's Pechev says that for the technology to really progress, a number of improvements and current technical issues will need to be resolved.

"It feels that most of the need in the future will be on software improvements over the current solvers and retargeting tools with emphasis on real-time," he says.

As motion capture moves forward, as well as potentially merging techniques, the systems used for the process will no doubt continue to become faster and easier to use.

"Certainly the tech will drive toward ease of use and the ability to be productive in mixed environments," predicts Elderfield. "An idea I find interesting is the marriage of various differing capture approaches in a way that exploits the benefits of each and overcomes the limitations."

Mo-cap studios should be wary then that through all the advances, if the technology begins to merge and progress away from its current democratised state and into a new realm of high quality and realism, there will be increased competition as companies compete more and more.

Whilst the future looks bright for the sector, game developers and console manufacturers need to work more closely with mo-cap studios to take full advantage of the tech that will already be in place, and present film quality animation that the developers and players crave, taking gaming into a new era of realism.

Above (top-to-bottom): Audiomotion's Mick Morris, Ikinema's Alexandre Pechev, Peter Clapperton from The Creative Assembly, and Vicon's Phil Elderfield

CREATING A CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE

The Cinemotus project being developed at Abertay University is a piece of tech that allows gaming motion-controllers to recreate established virtual camera techniques.

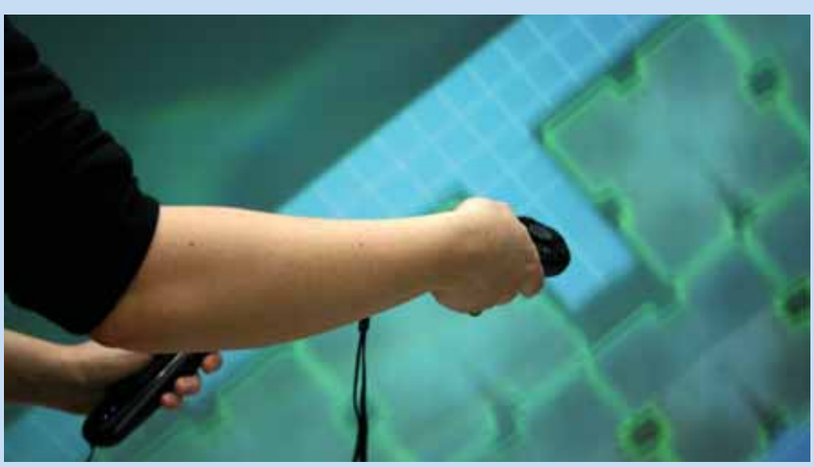
Matthew Bett, who leads the project, says that concept was originally developed to allow gamers more flexibility when viewing and recording action-replay sequences.

"The user can actually 'film' the replay with the motion-controller rather than be limited to static camera work," he explains.

"This has grown into a fully-fledged tool used with industry-standard 3D modelling packages to create camera work in CGI productions."

He says it can also be applied in the games industry producing similar cinematic content and in-game cut scenes, whilst also potentially offering applications in education and gameplay.

Bett adds that the chief benefit of the tech is giving the user a gameplay mechanic that is: "like its real-world counterpart. For creative uses the importance is the organic nature of the input – jitters and all – that allows the effects that make real camera work so much more compelling than a robotic motion."



The team is currently talking to a number of game, film and 3D effects companies, and says that the hardware will cause little disruption when used in development.

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The Work of Art

Will Freeman talks with Runescape art director Pascal Blanche about a creative endeavour that will never be finsihed

Jagex's art director Pascal Blanche says the role of concept artist has increasingly taken on more importance

AS JAGEX'S art director on its browser game *Runescape*, Pascal Blanche is charged with maintaining the quality bar for a huge range of assets.

From characters to environments, and across effects and UI, he and his team have a daunting responsibility; they must fill the bulging MMO with colour and character, all the while respecting stylistic continuity and the wants of a ferocious fanbase.

With a wealth of experience behind him both at Jagex and beyond the walls of the Cambridge-based studio, Blanche has seen the model of concept art evolve and flourish. He's a talent that aspiring game artists would be wise to follow, and a professional with plenty to teach even the most established game artists.

Develop caught up with him to talk about his career in the business of art, his responsibilities, and his perspective on a rapidly changing discipline.

What was your experience in the industry before you joined Jagex?

I've been in the gaming industry for over 17 years now. I started in small companies in France and moved to Canada where I was employed as the art director for Ubisoft Montreal for ten years. There I worked on the first official trailer for *Assassin's Creed* and also on *Myst IV Revelation*, *Naruto: Rise of a Ninja* and James Cameron's *Avatar* for PS3 and Xbox 360, all of which gave me some great experience. I really enjoyed working on it all.

And what made you interested in heading to the UK and joining Jagex to work on *RuneScape*?

After ten years away from Europe I really wanted to get closer to my family again. So I started to work as the animation director on the *Outsider* for Frontier, and just when the project sadly stopped, Jagex contacted me about the art director role.

The role offered me a chance to get into new territory and to work on a project with a hugely successful background and with so much continued potential. The production is constantly rolling from one update to another; and unlike most other MMOs we have weekly and monthly releases making the content and look of the game fresh and exciting. What's more, at Jagex direct feedback from the community plays a big part in decisions made and the releases we put out.

Over all that time in the industry, how have you seen the role of concept art in video game creation change?

I saw the role of concept art growing up during all those years, and becoming the base of all gaming production. It has become essential for game design, art design and production design as well.

Most concept artists now are used to creating speed-paintings and thumbnails to get a rough idea pretty fast. The needs of the production to an extent created the hybrid artists they've now become. Some concept artists are even good at storyboarding or illustrations, using other tools to create better and faster results such as Sketchup and Zbrush.

What in particular have you been focused on in your role on *RuneScape*?

In my role as art director I am the driving force in the continued evolving of graphical quality. The game has a great ten-year legacy of visual content, and with the tech constantly evolving there is a constant need to keep up-to-speed. So while we are still releasing new weekly content, we are also creating pure graphic update projects and have started to rework the whole *RuneScape* Lore, one bit at a time. My team and I are trying to create a more attractive and immersive game every day, whilst also continuing to respect the game's unique and popular atmosphere and spirit.

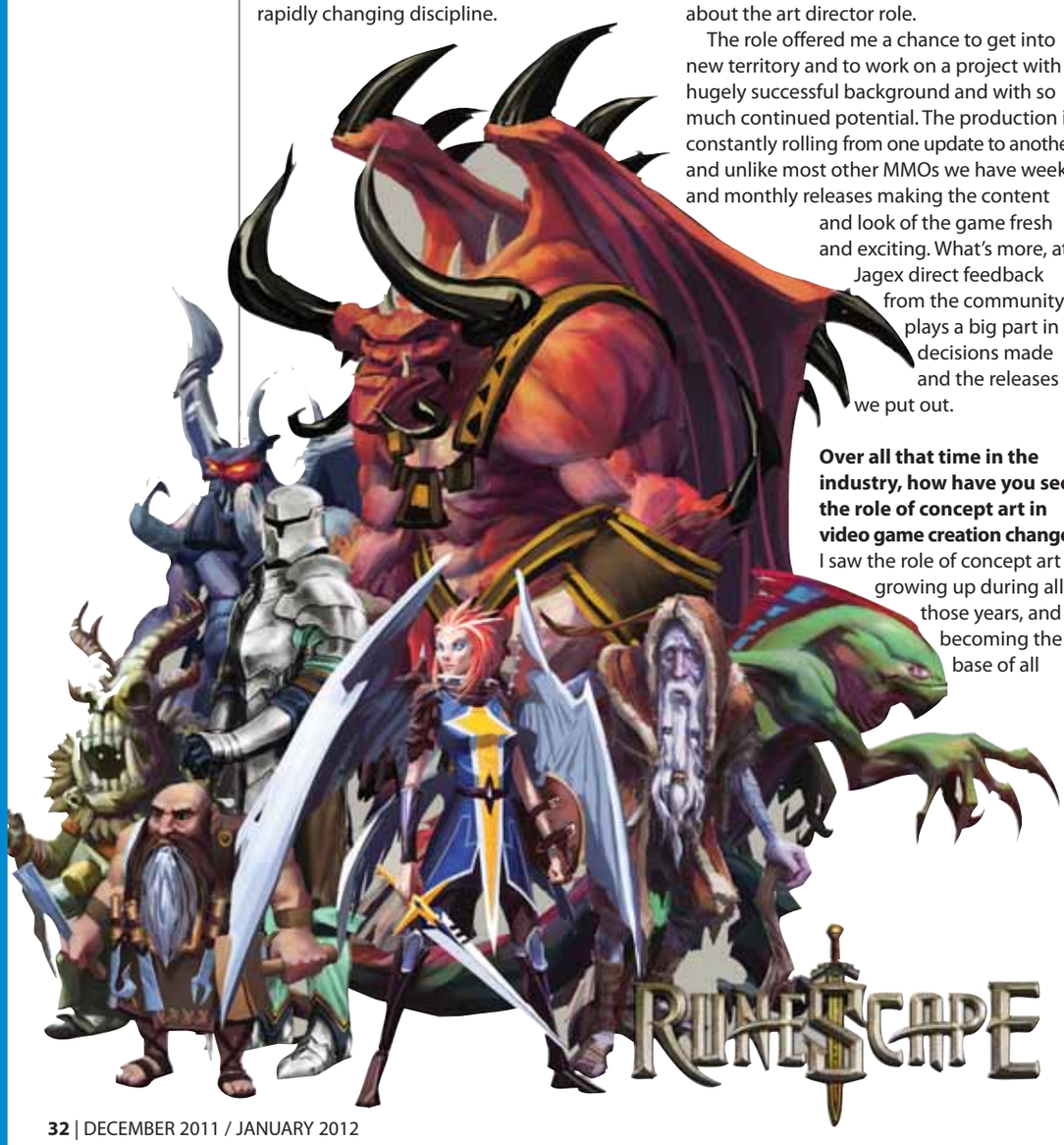
> ***"It is more epic, more vibrant, better animated, and it is certainly even harder to believe that it runs on a web-browser engine."***
>
> Pascal Blanche, Jagex

With regard to your team's role and creative output, how is the RuneScape franchise changing?

There are a lot of things that have improved dramatically in the eight months I've been on *RuneScape*. Technically speaking we have made improvements to our proprietary game engine to allow us to make some of the visual improvements we wanted to make in areas like lighting, bloom and water.

The new UI is now much more user friendly and dramatically more visually appealing.

Large areas of the *Runescape* world have been, and continue to be graphically improved. Recently the swamps, the wilderness, the forests have received big updates making them current and very attractive, as all the new content pushes the visuals to new highs. When you wander around the Myreque city – a vampire city – or



Pascal Blanche's artwork for Runescape helps visualise concepts for developers faced with a constantly evolving game world

fight your way up in the new Dominion tower, it is hard to believe that it is the same *RuneScape* as it was a year ago. It is more epic, more vibrant, better animated, and it is certainly even harder to believe that the game runs on a web-browser engine.

> ***"There's still lots more work to do and it will be a constant and evolving process."***
>
> Pascal Blanche, Jagex

And what are your plan's for RuneScape's future in terms of its graphical direction?
There are two main axes. My focus is still to get a better experience from the player's point of view. So on one side it is about the small things; like the player character redesign and animation, and overall the smaller eye candy pieces. Then on the other side there are the larger improvements like the environments and NPCs, to achieve a better sense of immersion and epic-ness; a place full of promise and challenges.

There's still lots more work to do and it will be a constant and evolving process, but the game continues to amaze me and I look forward to each and every improvement to amaze our players.

What challenges currently face the graphics and art disciplines in game design?
The challenges are everywhere and that's what makes the job so interesting. I think that the main ones are as we revamp, improve and update the *Runescape* franchise to attract more players, we need to stay true to its core.

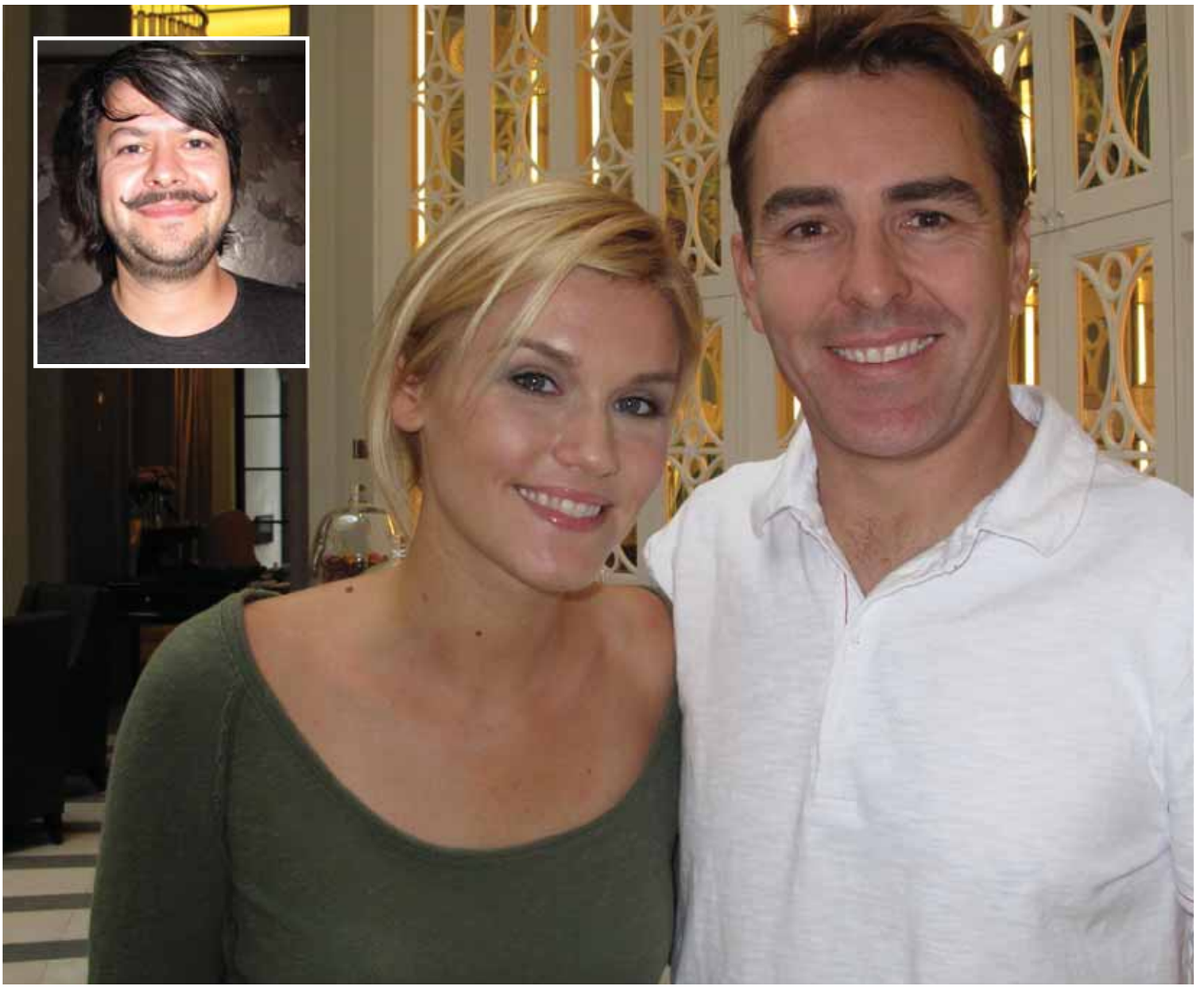
The other challenges we face are brought about by newcomer competitors coming to the market, some of which have heavier engines. They are not constrained by maybe some of the tech issues we are, but with a proprietary system these are at least within our control.

Even with our restrictions I believe *RuneScape* continues to offer a phenomenal game experience to our players that is fully accessible, and now with the constant updates to the visuals as well as newly released content we remain a game to be reckoned with. I can confirm that Jagex is going to continue to surprise.

With regard to your discipline, how has Jagex impressed you as a studio?
Although *RuneScape* is my first massively mulitplayer online production and I am not sure how things work in other companies, I must admit that I was and still am impressed by the talent and the passion of the team here at Jagex.

After all an art director is only as good as the team he is working with and with the team I have come into all I feel I have to do is to give them some pointers and a little push and the magic happens. It is always good to get some fresh perspective on a project, and I hope that is what I am bringing. I have no doubt though that *RuneScape* will continue to grow and develop and I am certainly delighted to be working on this game at this point. It is so exciting.
www.jagex.com

Updating and expanding Runescape has required a huge volume of concept art



Arne Meyer (insert) believes that shooting over the entire development period rather than in intensive three-week periods means the studio can get the most out of its performers, such as Emily Rose and Nolan North (above)

The Game's a Stage

Now the fidelity of mo-cap technology is catching every nuance of a game actor's performance, the performer's role is in the spotlight. **Will Freeman** asks the leading roles from Uncharted 3 how their craft is changing, and how they are changing games

WITH UNCHARTED 3 wrapped, the actors that gave Drake and many of his co-stars life have had a chance to rest and reflect on over five years embodying the same characters.

In that time, a lot has changed. Drake has emerged as one of gaming's most convincing protagonists, whilst mo-cap and animation technology has vastly improved its ability to record every detail of an actor's performance.

Today a performer can put their all into a game character, from the squint of an eye to their emotional soul. As such, game actors now have a huge creative influence and larger responsibility than ever.

That considered, isn't it about time they were allowed to exercise a little more of their craft? Actors have had input in film and television for decades. Perhaps game developers could benefit from encouraging a little of the same.

Naughty Dog certainly seem to think so, and Nolan North and Emily Rose – who play *Uncharted's* Nathan Drake and Elena Fisher respectively – have almost become as much a part of the team as those in traditional dev roles, such as level designers and artists.

BORN TO PERFORM

Under the watchful eye of series director Amy Hennig, North and Rose have had a remarkable effect on a game that has become something of a mascot and key franchise for the PlayStation 3.

> ***"Amy Hennig birthed the characters, but she has allowed us to raise them. We were able to infuse our personalities over the past five-and-a-half years into who the characters are."***
>
> Nolan North, actor

"For this series of games in particular I feel Amy Hennig birthed the characters, but she has allowed us to raise them," offers North. "We were able to infuse our personalities over the past five-and-a-half years into who the characters are."

And that, says North, has made it easier to play long-standing video game parts; to sustain nuances of character and make the on-screen relationships convincing and complicated.

"Amy has such an incredible skillset of writing and storytelling, and she has such a lack of ego, that as actors we're able to take the trunk of the story and branch off," adds North. "If that works, we keep it, and if it doesn't we get rid of it. It's a very organic process, and Amy can work on what we've done as actors and take it in new directions."

In fact, according to North, it is rare that Naughty Dog starts an *Uncharted* game with a full script. Instead, working with the development team, the actors help 'connect the dots' between Hennig's core ideas. There is no doubt; these actors help make the game.

From a purely creative perspective such an approach sounds ever so nice, but pragmatic developers have every right to ponder how workable it is as a business model considering the make-up of most studios across the globe.

AS SEEN ON TV

To make Hennig's somewhat unique approach to working with actors practical, Naughty Dog has had to realise an entirely new approach to games development workflow.

"We have these recurring characters, and the way we shoot and our workflow is very much like a TV series. We shoot very frequently across the period of development rather than in three intense weeks, so everyone from this ensemble cast gets to know and work with one another over time," explains Naughty Dog community strategist Arne Meyer.

It's a model that's certainly popular with the acting talent. The methodology has allowed North, Rose and their colleagues to better form their characters and the game world they share. It has also given them the opportunity to acquire an understanding of the game development process that has allowed them to collaborate with the team like few actors have done with a games studio before.

And, according to Rose, the model of working with actors employed by Naughty Dog has set a new standard that film and TV producers could learn much from.

"For me working with *Uncharted* in my life has set such a high standard for the way things should be done," she says. "When you work on television with some creators, their word is gold, and that's fine. I mean, you wouldn't want to input there, and then some writers could really do with a bit of help.

"Amy, though, has set this high standard because while you shouldn't really differ from what she says, at the same time she encourages collaboration. She'll even say 'here's this crap I came up with last night. Now you can make it better'. She actually says that. I can't believe it. And then you read it and it's amazing, but she'll encourage us to riff off one another as we do a table reading."

Any observers that doubt Rose's perspective may be interested to learn that the final moments of the final cut of *Uncharted 2* were utterly improvised. Undisputable proof, then, that Hennig is not too precious about her opus to let her actors off the leash.

An enthusiastic interpretation of what Naughty Dog is doing is redefining the way actors work with creators. There is little or no hierarchy in terms of producers overlooking and micromanaging at the studio, and through the extended shoots and closeness between actors and developers, there is a level of trust that those inside the walls of Naughty Dog insist is unrivalled.

Rose even considers that the approach might be confined to Hennig and her co-workers: "I just don't know if other games studios could handle this model. The risky way that Naughty Dog works is so unique to them. The 'organic-ness' of everything, and the way it is on the fly and the fact that the development team is so in sync with each other just wouldn't work in many places."

Whether or not the approach is one that other studios could easily adopt, the *Uncharted* outfit has made many actors very happy, and its games have become famed for the believable, human and likeable quality of their characters.

In fact, what Hennig and her team are doing – in adopting and tailouring the existing approach to shooting content so prolific in film and television – is even allowing the cast to begin pondering the emergence of a new school of acting theory; and one that is specifically conceived for game and special effects work.

> ***"TV networks control creators. It's so different with games. The freedom from Sony and Naughty Dog is amazing."***
>
> Emily Rose, actress

"I think performance capture offer actors acting in its purest form," suggests North, as he begins to hint at an approach to acting 'systems' pioneered by the likes of Andy Serkis.

METHOD IN THE MADNESS

Alec Guinness, who North highlights as an inspiration and an idol, has long been an advocate of developing a character from the outside, and projecting it in. It's quite the opposite of acting theory's most famous name; Constantin Stanislavski. It was he who pioneered the 'method' approach to acting which centred around the inner being of the actor and bringing that to the outside. Guinness' approach, argues North, is one that any actor squeezed into a mo-cap suit should seriously consider.

"With mo-cap it's acting in its purest form because you need that imagination. It's play acting; it's the imagination, and it it's a matter of grasping onto specific moments and really connecting with the other actors in a way you don't normally have to do, especially in games where you're alone with the microphone," says North of acting in a world of high-fidelity mo-cap, adding: "It's a new way of acting that requires a new way of thinking."

The Uncharted series has been widely praised for its believable and characterful performances

A SPECIAL EFFECT

The actors' work on the *Uncharted* series has brought them a great many things. Rose admits it has provided a significant boost to her skillset as an actress in a range of industries increasingly dominated by special effects. She is adamant that performing in games now has risen to a level of respectability that has her colleagues the world over keen to seek work at the new frontier of game acting.

What's more, Rose has even had her eyes opened by gaming to many of the failings of the conventions that dominate the film and TV studios scattered through Los Angeles and beyond.

"There's too many controlling people in Hollywood and that industry," states Rose. "Networks control creators. It's so different with games. The freedom Sony gives Naughty Dog, and the freedom from Naughty Dog all the way down is amazing. There's so much trust, and I think part of that is because of Amy."

If there is a new movement in game acting – one that sees performers working more closely with developers in crafting a game – then it has a way to go. Naughty Dog's method and its relationship with Rose and North remains fairly atypical.

Rushed shoots crammed into just a few days still dominate the industry landscape, and many game actors still only see the insides of an ADR booth.

That is changing though, and bold developers who are not too adverse to risk could do well from inviting actors a little closer, and listening to their insights throughout a game's development.

Direct action

At London voice recording outfit OMUK a new model for talent direction is evolving. **Will Freeman** investigates

Veteran director Mark Estdale believes voice actors need to connect with the moments that the player lives through in the game world

WHILE IT'S easy to be excited by the likes of full performance capture, the good old voice over recording session remains a fundamental and relevant process in the game developer's arsenal.

And, like the role of actors explored on the previous pages, the responsibility of the VO director is also undergoing a significant change.

At least, that's the case at OMUK, where veteran casting and voice director Mark Estdale has built a recording facility like few others. Stood in the booth, the actor looks through the glass to a studio fronted not by an engineer, but a director.

That director is Estdale himself, who believes that there must be a change in directing game voice actors.

"What we're trying to do here at OMUK is, instead of putting games into a traditional model, to bring the performances to life. If you follow the traditional directing and acting model, you'll get the best the traditional model can offer. What I'm trying to do is build a model for recording performance that is suited to navigating the maze that is a game's script; that whole complex, branching, looping madness that it can be."

LIVE FOR THE MOMENT

Core to Estdale's concept is that game scripts are no longer linear narratives still typical of film and theatre.

Take, for example, *Driver: San Francisco*, to which OMUK helped in recording audio for a game script fleshed out by 30 writers over 200,000 words and several hundred characters. For an actor to comprehend that entire world and their place in such a fractured 'narrative' is near impossible, so the director must help the actors focus on the many thousands of moments that make up the atmosphere of the game.

"You now have to help actors unlearn what they have learned about becoming a character," explains Estdale of the changing role of VO directors. "People say that the more you become a character, the more you can assimilate that character, and the more real your performance will be. Well, I think that's bollocks really. All you need to do is help actors connect truthfully with these moments that the player lives inside. There's a different model of acting emerging for games, and that means a new model of directing must also emerge."

> ***"There's a different model of acting emerging for games, and that means a new model of directing must also emerge."***
>
> Mark Estdale, OMUK

A CLOSE CALL

Estdale also advocates a method where the director gets as close to the actor as possible. He's happy to admit he'd quite like to be in the booth with the actors if it were feasible, and he has developed a system whereby he can deliver visual and audio assets to the talent instantaneously via linked monitors and speakers.

The actor alone in the booth also has access to an open mic feed from the other side of the glass, meaning he or she is party to all the conversation around the mixing desk.

This holistic methodology that seems to be working for OMUK, which has developed an immense portfolio that is now close to numbering over 500 titles.

"It's almost a philosophical approach here; a philosophical change," offers Estdale. "A game's director must help an actor move towards working on a kind of instinct. A director needs to get actors to give that subtlety, that naturalness of behaviour, and you do that from the front of the studio; not tucked away behind and engineer. You do it through the make-up of your studio."

And it is the make-up of OMUK's London facility that has allowed the team to realise their vision of what a VO director must now offer. And in this model, the director in this new context is emerging as a role with a significantly increased impact on the creative process of developing a game.

www.omuk.com

The OMUK recording studio allows actors to instantaneously see context for their part through the delivery of visual and audio assets

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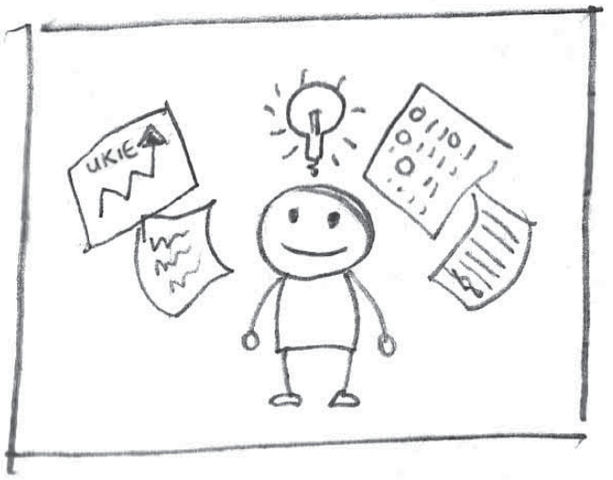

Character receives UKIE Charts, data & reports to help them choose game target and move to the next level

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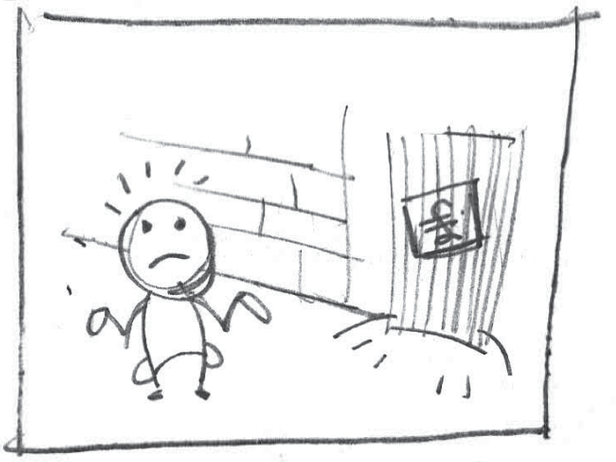

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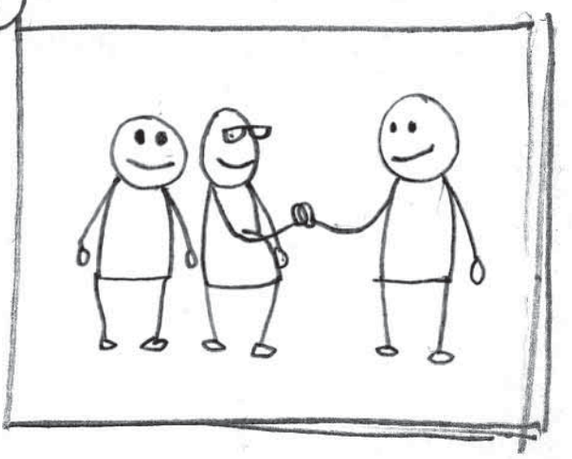

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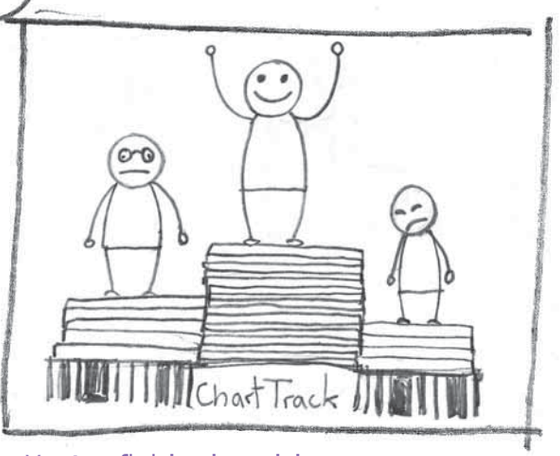

You've finished and have a successful game!

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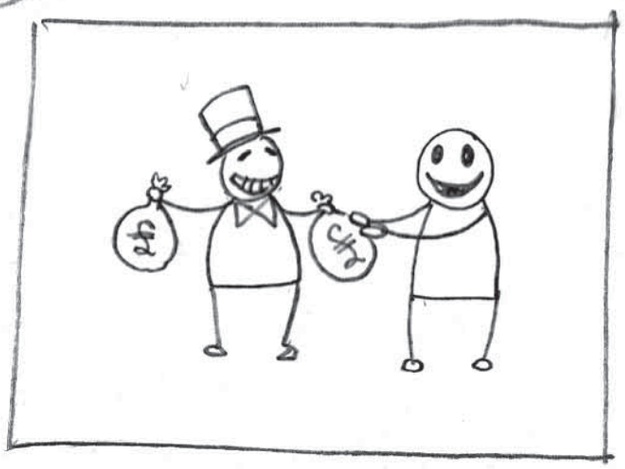

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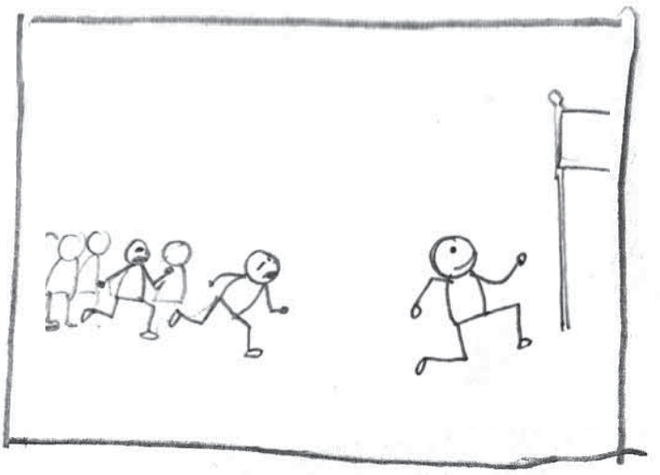

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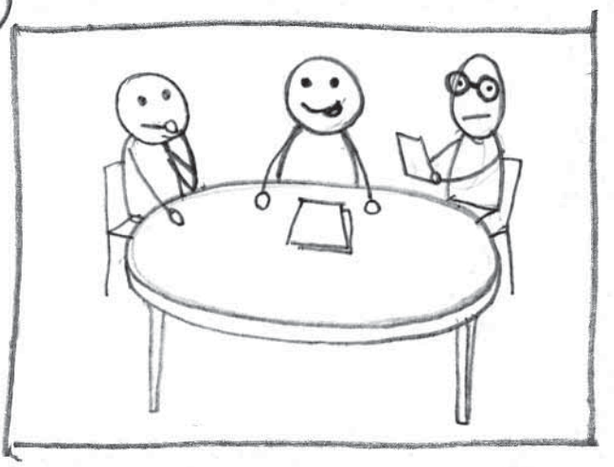

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The Fame Game

Italian studio Geniaware has signed a footballing legend to consult on its new 'lifestyle sim' Lords of Football. **Will Freeman** asks if it can really be more than a celebrity endorsement

Claudio Giacopazzi (top), Riccardo Capra (middle), and Sabrina Gasson (above) believe hiring famous names has helped greatly with the game's development

Italian footballing legend Gianluca Vialli provided the Geniaware team with his knowledge of the sport whilst also being involved in parts of the game's development

WHEN GENIAWARE began work on *Lords of Football*, it never hoped to mimic the likes of *FIFA* or *Football Manager*.

In fact, since conception, it was supposed to offer a very different football experience. Positioned on the crossroads where god games, traditional sports titles and virtual pets intersect, *Lords of Football* charges players with overseeing a team of players and filling their lives day and night. It is, says developer Geniaware, a lifestyle simulator, and it's being made in conjunction with a giant of the sometimes-bewildering world of top flight football.

Manager, pundit and former Italy superstar player Gianluca Vialli has been involved in *Lords of Football* as an advisor and case study to inform the team.

Celebrity consulting is nothing new, of course, and it's easy to imagine that the 'involvement' of a famed personality is cursory at best. Surely, after all, it is just celebrity endorsement under another name, with little effort on behalf of the talent?

INVESTING IN FAME

In fact, in Vialli's case, he was assigned to Geniaware's project by FishEagle, the investors behind *Lords of Football*.

"FishEagle appointed Gianluca as consultant to ensure accuracy in simulating football was as high as possible," explains Geniaware general manager Claudio Giacopazzi. "He's a great choice considering his incredibly successful career."

Geniaware insists that Vialli has provided a wealth of expertise on the football world, from insights into training to a sense a footballer's difficult journey through the glare of the media and the competitive ranks of the sport.

"Gianluca strongly believes that in order to bring the best out of your players and to build a successful team the manager has to be able to prepare the athletes whilst being mindful that they're human beings," says technical director Riccardo Capra.

> ***"Vialli has fallen in love with the Lords of Football gameplay and has worked enthusiastically and closely with the development team."***
>
> Sabrina Gasson, Geniaware

"This is why he has fallen in love with the *Lords of Football* gameplay and has worked enthusiastically and closely with the whole development team, getting involved in the decision making process for matters like branding and in-game training routines.

Vialli has apparently pushed Geniaware to develop something that alone they may have not managed. But do the problems inherent to working with outsider celebrities outweigh the benefits?

STAR STRUCK

"They're super busy most of the time," admits Geniaware marketing director Sabrina Gasson. "Arranging our Golden Scarf campaign with Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini and pinning him down to receive his award before his big FA Cup Final in May of this year was a challenge."

And yet Geniaware see working with talent as worth the frustration. Big names not only bring awareness to the studio – which is currently recruiting in substantial numbers – they can also provide invaluable information that can grant a game the authenticity that can make or break its sales. And, apparently, Vialli's presence has made the studio so optimistic despite the tough Italian economy, that plans for further titles are already in the pipeline.

Supported as it is by some of the biggest names in football, it might just be that Geniaware really could exceed expectation.

www.geniaware.com

CATCHING STARS

When Geniaware signed football legend Gianluca Vialli as a consultant, the team were granted an arsenal of knowledge and experience that has greatly informed their latest development project.

But what have they learned of the process of getting the most from talent? First and foremost, to give the star in question room; space to relax, be themselves and input ideas without fear of being rebuffed.

"Allowing our prestigious contributors to talk about their football lifestyle is of utmost importance as we're using this experience to build the bulk of our game design," explains Geniaware marketing director Sabrina Gasson. "Also, it's about just letting them be themselves really. Watching their lives and analysing their behaviour is just as useful for reference inside the game."

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Rebelling against the norm

As Rebellion finishes work on its third-person shooter Neverdead, **Craig Chapple** asks creative producer Shinta Nojiri and senior producer Aeron Guy why they decided to blend Eastern and Western development sensibilities for the project

Shinta Nojiri (above) was brought in to lead the Neverdead project whilst Aeron Guy (top) tried to ensure the entire dev team had creative input

THE WAY EASTERN and Western games are developed has diverged apart over the years, as have the interests and tastes of the regions' audiences.

Whilst the Western approach is generally seen as a more collaborative, team based effort, with all the members having an input into the a game's creation, the Eastern methodology has evolved in the opposite direction. There development is more focused on one person's direction, vision and leadership, with the rest of the studio working towards their goal.

Rebellion and Konami have decided to blend these methodologies with their latest title *Neverdead*. The game is a triple-A third-person shooter in which the player takes control of an immortal demon hunter who can survive losing limbs as he battles monsters and discovers what is causing the strange events in a peaceful city.

THE SHINTA FACTOR

Konami's Shinta Nojiri, who was a game designer on *Metal Gear Solid 4*, was brought in from Japan as creative producer on the *Neverdead* project. He led the game's production through the classic Eastern style of strong leadership and a singular direction of where he wanted to take the game.

"I know I didn't need many discussions and it was confusing the team," he says of the game's development. "I believe that to make a unique game it requires a strong vision of one person. I tried to share my vision but it took so long time to share it."

With Shinta's strong personality and approach perhaps making some devs reticent to a methodology they are not accustomed to, senior producer Aeron Guy was put in place to bring in a more Western sensibility to the title.

"It was my responsibility to ensure that the development team realised the vision for the game Konami defined, whilst ensuring their input is considered and that we produced something that would appeal to both Eastern and Western audiences," he explains.

> ***"Both methods have their benefits and challenges, so it's a case of finding the former and overcoming the latter."***
>
> Aeron Guy, Rebellion

"This means being involved in every part of the process from fleshing out the initial concept, prototyping, ensuring the development pipelines are all as efficient as possible, and that the game ultimately delivers on time and on budget."

Aeron says this was done as the Rebellion team was keen to ensure that the game had something different to offer.

"We think it combines the best of both worlds – Shinta's unique ideas for the game and our team turning them into reality, but with their own take on them. Hopefully with *Neverdead* we can show East and West can come together to produce something that is actually quite special."

Past efforts at combing the development cultures have perhaps not been successful as the methodologies continue to diverge and evolve independently. Aeron cites differences in culture and language barriers as playing a large part in the difference.

"Personally I think these kinds of failures come from mainly miscommunication in translation," adds Shinta. "We are about to finish the project, but of course we had many language troubles due to my no good English ability. Personally I hope it was not so serious."

LIMITING MARKETS

Both developers believe that if the regional approaches continue to evolve independently of one another, both industries could end up limiting their markets.

"As Shinta says, the Western market has boomed and now eclipses the Japanese market," explains Aeron. "If we ignore a market, we're limiting the appeal of our games, and also encouraging these markets to diverge still further. Both ways of doing things have their benefits and challenges, so it's a case of finding the former and overcoming the latter."

As for the future, Shinta claims as the Japanese market has become smaller, developers need to take on similar approaches such as that on *Neverdead* if they are to grow again and build worldwide appeal.

"Now the Western market is much bigger than the Japanese market. We cannot ignore this," he says. "To sell titles all over the world, we feel that we should not develop a title only by Japanese staff with their sense and taste. Besides, in the Japanese market Western titles are getting popular among hardcore games, which is different from ten years ago.

"In a sense it might be a Japanese side demand. Even if the 'Western meets Eastern' game doesn't become the mainstream, personally I hope it provides different a taste and flavour."

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Centre of Excellence?

As the industry shifts toward a new digital age, studios in the UK's Midlands are determined to adapt. **Will Freeman** and **Craig Chapple** sat down at the recent Launch conference in Birmingham with the leading lights in the region to discuss how the area – and the wider industry – is facing up to the many new challenges

Jamie Macdonald of Codemasters (left), Blitz's Philip Oliver (centre) and Trevor Williams from Playground (above) ponder the future of the Midlands games industry

Develop: A continual concern for the entire industry – and the theme for Birmingham's recent Launch conference – is the transistion to digital. How well positioned are the Midlands area studios and service providers in this regard?
Philip Oliver, Blitz Games Studios: I think what Birmingham is doing with this Launch event and incubation centre is actually fantastic for start-ups. When you are a start-up you can now have creative and technological people create games, and they know how to create games. Although when it actually comes to running a business we're kind of the worst people as gamers. I know because I didn't do well originally. But I think creating an environment like this and a network of people, supply chains and business leads is fantastic, so I think this particular centre is very good in helping with that transition.

The Midlands games industry is home to some of the UK's most well established studios. Does that strength in the traditional sector mean the challenge of digital is especially tough here?
Oliver: Maybe so, but I think for all kinds of companies it's a common challenge. What I'm encouraged by is how many new start-ups there are here, and we'll see in two or three years time how many survive and how many will thrive, but its really encouraging. There's a lot of entrepreneurial spirit around.

> ***"With any start-up there is a mortality rate and there is no getting round that. I always used to tell everyone 'just don't do it'."***
>
> Philip Oliver, Blitz Games

Matthew Hidderley, Birmingham Science Park: That's right. And I think we just need to encourage that more. There really are some fantastic studios in the Midlands. If we can all use our resources a lot better and accept that, actually, if we do support these small start-up indie studios then we as an industry will be far better off going forward.

So maybe some formal program where we get a lot more industry mentors to get involved with not only this incubation program in the Science Park, but wider afield as well could be done. And that can be done remotely through tele-presence or through physical presence and conferences as well.

Oliver: With any start-up there is a mortality rate and there is no getting round that. I always used to tell everybody just don't do it, don't start your own business, because the mortality rate is quite high. Everybody is quite optimistic and thinks it'll work out, but you only need one thing wrong to pull you down. You can get nine right; but get one thing wrong and you're out.

But I have changed slightly with digital distribution because the barrier for entry, and the amount you need to invest before you come to market has been reduced so considerably that it's now an affordable risk. But what I would actually say is make sure it is an affordable risk; don't mortgage yourself so ridiculously that if anything doesn't work that you are screwed.

Trevor Williams, Playground Games: I was talking to Oli – the CEO of NeonPlay – yesterday about how they kept going and how you can generate revenue quite quickly. He had no seat capital. It was a risk because

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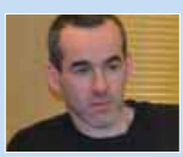

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Freestyle Games Pete O'Donnell (right) listens intently as Codie's Alex McLean (left) highlights the importance of start-up marketing spend

they did it on their own money, but they were able to release a game, and because the game was successful, they were able to generate revenue quickly. Whereas the big console business is quite different, you have to generate a lot of cash up front before you get it in return.

Speaking to the CEO of the Birmingham Science Park, David Hardman, it seemed apparent that finding investors that are specifically interested in investing in technology companies, and funding in this area in general, has been hard, even in contrast to the rest of the country.

Williams: We've always found it hard. I've founded three start-ups and we've always done it with our own money. We've tried hard to get other money; we've just never been successful.

> ***"I think some investors have also been burned as well; so some of the guys who liked the sector don't want to come back."***
>
> Trevor Williams, Playground

Hidderley: We find that with the old fashioned traditional engineering companies, the investors are a lot more open; they know the business models. But we find that investors generally just do not understand games and technology businesses as much. We're churning out a lot of entrepreneurs and good ideas but they just do not understand games.

Jamie MacDonald, Codemasters: I think that's fair, but I think that's common to the UK generally. We all have friends on the west coast of the US, and it seems as long as you have some decent ideas and a decent business model you can get the funding. Even in other parts of Europe it's easier.

Hidderley: We've got an Oxygen accelerator program. They've been with us for 13 weeks and we've pumped £20,000 into each business, and then we're trying to get investors in to come and see those people and their response is very difficult.

We're doing an investment day in London, Birmingham and Manchester, but they just don't seem to understand technology as much.

Williams: I think some of them have also been burned as well; so some of the guys who liked the sector just don't want to come back again.

Iain Harrison, GamerCamp: I think it leads into the Government not giving any help to the industry in this country. I've got a friend in Scotland who was at Realtime Worlds when it shut and he's done a start-up. He was telling me the amount of help he's got off the Scottish Government is phenomenal. They're paying £10,000 towards the wages of every member of staff he takes on.

MacDonald: It's an interesting one isn't it? Over the years I've had quite a lot of involvement with government. But you know, it's a dead hand.

Oliver: We got very close with the cultural cash credits. We eventually got the R&D tax credits being applied to video games, which was very good, and then we got better terms and squeezed more out of it over the years. So I actually do think we got somewhere, but its nothing compared moneywise to £10,000 per employee.

Pete O'Donnell, Freestyle: We've all been in games so long, and if you went round this

A RARE VIEW

Develop asks Rare's senior studio director Craig Duncan how he feels about the Midlands industry and how developers can face the challenges ahead.

Is it a good thing so many microstudios are setting up in the region, or is this a symptom of problems such as the fall of big studios?

Ultimately more studios of any shape and size is great for the industry. It's all about economics; a larger studio has the potential and bandwidth to create an experience that can change the landscape, appealing to a larger business opportunity and audience, but that opportunity requires more investment.

A microstudio usually targets smaller experiences or parts of projects that it is hopeful it can get the funding, traction or opportunity to cover a smaller business cost.

> ***"Business and publishing are both hugely specialised and varied subjects that need real expertise and focus in any studio."***
>
> Craig Duncan, Rare

There will always be a need for all sizes and spectrums of games, and more competition will drive higher quality that is fundamentally driven by the talent and expertise within studios, so it's a good thing.

Should young devs be taught more about business and publishing side?

Absolutely. Making a game is only half the story, and greater appreciation of business opportunity and publishing execution will help developers of any level to understand where opportunity lies for them. Business and publishing are both hugely specialised and varied subjects that need real expertise and focus in any studio.

Has being situated in the Midlands contributed to Rare's success?

Being a first-party Microsoft studio, we look at ourselves as a part of a global company as well as a Midlands company, but here is great in terms of connectivity for UK and worldwide travel.

GamerCamp's Iain Harrison (far left), Birmingham Science Park's Matthew Hidderley (centre) and Rich Eddy (above) of Codies fame

table and asked, in three years time where should we put our resources? What game should we make? No one would know. So if I'm a venture capitalist guy, and someone asks me for £50,000-to-£1 million, it's like 'I don't know' and I live and breathe computer games. It's so hard for them because they just haven't got the level of expertise and level of knowledge that we've got, and we don't even know.

MacDonald: The thing we don't want to be like is the UK film industry. They have got used to the idea of huge public subsidy, and to what effect? I saw a stat the other day where around a hundred films made by the UK film industry last year weren't released theatrically. You think, why is it put there? Basically it's a big job creation scheme for that industry. Why do we put up with it? I guess its because MPs like to go to film premieres and hang about that crowd.

Rich Eddy, Codemasters: And gaming still isn't referenced as a cultural item. Music, films and books are all cultural items; that's why anyone can go and plug any TV show, and music as well, which is still a commercial product, and that's why they can promote on the BBC. Games are just a basic commercial white goods product you cannot be seen to be promoting.

Oliver: The cultural tax breaks, they obviously got approved for about a week before the new Government came in, and then got taken away. But they weren't saying it wasn't cultural, but saying we need to save some money. Which is a bit short sighted because I think it would have made them more money in the long run. Part of that was because somebody – a big known publisher which I'm not going to name here – didn't want games to be culturally classified, and went in at the highest levels of government to have that undone.

As for the skills and the talent available in the Midlands, do you feel particularly well supported? Or is it the same everywhere?

Oliver: It's the same as everywhere in the UK. I know that there is the Livingstone-Hope report, and their number one thing is to get programming back into the national curriculum and I so want that to happen because I do think that is the biggest problem of our industry.

And in fact its not just our industry. It's going to affect the whole bloody country because everybody needs people to be able to work on computers, and not just work on them, but work under the hood as well.

> ***"The thing we don't want to be like is the UK film industry. They have got used to the idea of huge public subsidy, and to what effect?"***
>
> Jamie Macdonald, Codemasters

We're just going to end up not being able to because we've lost it for 15 years and now we can't even hire the teachers to teach it. Everything's just broken down so badly now that it's going to take a hell of a lot to put it back again. There's a shortage of supply in the UK in general of programmers.

I think when it comes to universities, they're keen and they want to because they know they've got the courses, but they just can't get the students in and filter out the good ones. People have applied because it's a games course but they can't show their talent. There's no tools for them to, and no starting point.

In some ways the Midlands is actually quite good because you can actually pretty much recruit from anywhere in the country. I would imagine there are certain parts in the country with extremities that are going to find their catchment area smaller. But the Midlands catchment area is pretty much the whole country.

MacDonald: GamerCamp is a great idea because of the fact that it's post-graduate only and it teaches some real skills to be used in the industry. It has been a scandal really the amount of money that's been wasted on undergraduate courses on kids that will never get a job in the industry.

In the console world – maybe I'm old fashioned – I like people to have really good first degrees from good universities in computer science, then they can do a gaming course.

Let's not forget that we are competing in a global industry so we have to compete with the best in the world. We can't do that with people who are not up to it.

Oliver: I was at a talk that Frontier's David Braben gave and he was saying that he recommends everybody who wants to get into game programming go into a computer science course because you'll get enough skills and be respected by the games industry. But more than that, you'll be respected by every other industry.

The problem is if you go on a games programming course, if you get into the games industry well done, but actually your odds probably aren't that good, and if you don't, you're screwed. It's worth nothing, which is a problem.

MacDonald: But just as a counterpoint, because I know that David and Phillip were talking about this before, let's not forget that there are other much needed skills in the games industry.

Oliver: Yes, there are, but what I was going to say was that programming is always the

bottleneck. It always has been at Blitz and I think it probably is at most these places.

When it comes to the artists, we need very good artists, we hunt for good artists, but there are enough coming through that it's not the thing that holds your business back. On the programming front, it holds your business back.

MacDonald: I take your point, but I'd also say over the last ten years the biggest skill problem is in the design discipline just because there wasn't anywhere you could actually train to be a game designer.

Are there other industry challenges the Midlands needs to focus on?

Oliver: One contentious issue is that lots of the microstudios have come about because they lost their jobs at the big studios and can't get back in and therefore are just doing this whilst they're looking.

Williams: I half agree with that. I think that the fact that someone lost their job gave them the opportunity to do that. I think some people choose to do it rather than go back into a big studio.

So there's a feeling that microstudios have perhaps been romanticised, and may be a symptom of another problem rather than a glorious paradigm shift?

Oliver: There was some minister talking about it up in Dundee or Manchester who was like 'wow this is brilliant, there's all these companies,' But the main reason all these companies are here is because the big employers have gone down. When you look at how many now have jobs now versus how many did have jobs, it's horrendous.

MacDonald: But it's a good thing. I'd rather that than they all go to Montréal.

O'Donnell: The thing for me about digital development studios and start-ups is there is not enough information being pushed about digital publishing. This is my big problem. The guy from Google said you can publish your game in five minutes. His point is that you can upload your apps easily, but that doesn't mean anyone's going to buy it. All these start-ups can make these great games but it's so difficult to get out there.

Alex McLean, Codemasters: If I was a business partner for a start-up and I didn't see a significant allocation of spend against marketing or something like that, I wouldn't consider their effort credible. I would just ask the question: 'How will you succeed without that allocation of spend?'

O'Donnell: I think it's such an important part, even for GamerCamp as well. We can get all these guys that want to start their own studio and that's fine. But we need such a big part of it to be business and how you're going to sell, turnover, when its going to come in, the cash flow etcetera, and hopefully that side of it is being covered as well.

MacDonald: One does have to accept that publishers do do something.

THE NEW GENERATION SPEAKS OUT

DISTORTED POETRY

Formed in February 2011 by James Booth and Steve Parkes, Distorted Poetry develops games for handheld and mobile devices, recently releasing *Petri-Dash* on the App Store.

Booth says there isn't enough financial support for developers in the Midlands as it stands, after Screen WM closed down and Creative England waits to start its funding schemes. He states, however, there has been great support from Birmingham City University and GamerCamp, the latter of which has trained up four members of the small studio's team. He adds that one recent improvement in the area is the number of business incubation programs that have started. Distorted Poety itself was formed through one of these programs, called e4f, at the Birmingham Science Park, which provides free office space as well as help and advice on business development.

"Something like that is perfect for a start-up, especially when, like us, you don't have a background in business," he says.

www.distortedpoetry.com

"Something like the e4f incubation program is perfect for a start-up, especially when, like us, you don't have a background in business."

James Booth, Distorted Poetry

SOSHI GAMES

Social music games studio Soshi Games is a small team of 12 currently working on *Music Festivals*, a city building style game which features more than 15 million songs and asks players to sign and book real bands to perform in their virtual world.

Countering Booth's assertion of the lack of financial support, Soshi CEO Kevin Corti believes the Midlands offers good backing and it is improving all the time.

"There are some funding opportunities if you have a strong business case. We just secured £200,000 seed funding through Midven, a regional seed fund, for example," he says.

He is also keen to highlight that there is an abundance of office space available for new creative and tech companies, highlighting the Birmingham Science Park that has supported the studio with cheap rent, equipment and tech services.

He adds that the Midlands is also a great place to be for hiring new computer science graduates, but conceded that it's tough finding experienced staff.

www.soshigames.com

"There are some funding opportunities if you have a strong business case. We just secured £200,000 seed funding through Midven, for example."

Kevin Corti, Soshi Games

FISH IN A BOTTLE

Browser and mobile developer Fish in a Bottle has worked on titles such as a digital version of Activision's *DJ Hero 2*, and the World War II web game *303 Squadron* for Channel 4.

Founder Justin Eames reveals that the ambitious studio has just invested "a six figure sum" of their own money into IP generation, having developed for other companies' brands in the past.

He says that the Leamington Spa area is a hot spot for games development, with lots of support between companies. But adds that unfortunately it is not known for that outside of the core console games industry which made the hub famous.

"Anyone who looks at the Midlands games scene and thinks it's too mature for support, or hasn't any further potential, is making the mistake of several lifetimes," insists Eames.

He also claims that rather than rely heavily on institutional backing, young businesses need support through mentoring, opportunity and knowledge sharing.

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"Anyone who looks at the Midlands games scene and thinks it's too mature for support is making the mistake of several lifetimes."

Justin Eames, Fish in a bottle

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Going digital the right way

Are we going about making online games the wrong way? **Neil Harris** of Idea Fabrik considers the medium's future

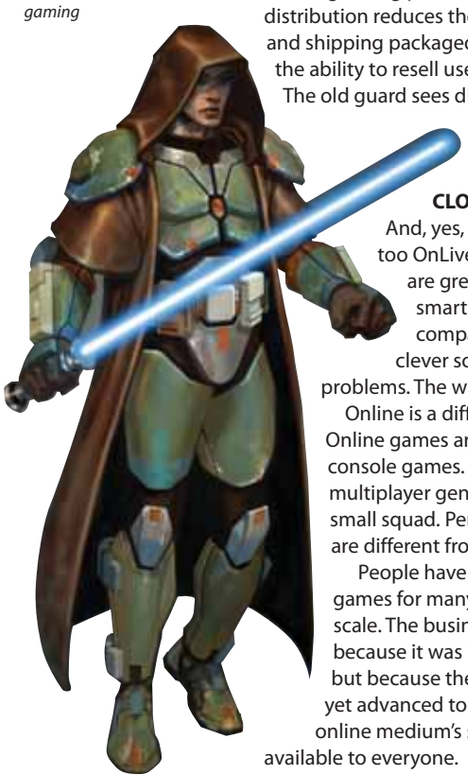
THEY are doing it wrong again. Every time that a new medium emerges the old guard's first move is to retrofit. They look at the new medium as a new distribution channel for the same old stuff.

I'm talking about cloud gaming.

When moving pictures were invented the first wave of product were stage plays filmed with a camera that did not move. Producers viewed movies as a solution to an existing problem – rather than paying to transport the actors and sets from playhouse to playhouse, they could film the play and make copies. We know now that this was the wrong problem. Movies are something different than plays – cameras can move and film can be edited, and a powerful new medium was created.

Now, video games are going through similar growing pains. Using the internet for distribution reduces the costs of creating and shipping packaged goods, eliminates the ability to resell used goods, and more. The old guard sees digital as the answer to their issues .

Harris believes Star Wars: The Old Republic could herald a new era in online gaming



HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

And, yes, I'm talking about you too OnLive and Gaikai. These are great technologies. Very smart people run these companies. They created clever solutions to the problems. The wrong problems.

Online is a different medium. Online games are different from console games. The massively multiplayer genre is different from small squad. Persistent world titles are different from arena-based ones.

People have been building online games for many years on a smaller scale. The business was not small because it was inferior to console, but because the technology had not yet advanced to the point where the online medium's strengths were available to everyone.

It's not about moving digital bits from the publishers to the players; it's about connecting the players to each other. It's about an ongoing stream of new content.

It's TV versus movies. Publishers create games the way movie studios create major motion pictures – a years-long expensive process that requires huge up-front marketing. The best online games are more episodic – because the publisher maintains an ongoing connection to the player. The best games create a continuous stream of content. There is always something new. A movie lasts 90-to-120 minutes; a TV series has 1,000 minutes of programming per season and a console game has 50-to-100 hours of play, whilst people play online games for that many hours in a single month, and then for years.

> ***"We can't just retrofit old games and shove them through new pipes. That doesn't take advantage of the medium's strengths."***
>
> Neil Harris, Idea Fabrik

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Some social game studios are getting there. We can't just retrofit old games and shove them through new pipes. That doesn't take advantage of the strengths of the medium.

What about *World of Warcraft*? What about Zynga? I think they are not there yet.

The issue I see with *WoW* is that they release content more like movie studios release sequels, with updates every year or so. Zynga does a beautiful job testing and polishing its game systems for launch, but the flow of new content doesn't keep up with the most active players – each title peaks in a month and then go into a long decline. Social gaming, just like social media, is about engagement, and studios like Zynga fall short.

The Answer? Online games need frequent updates and constant interaction with players.

It is not my purpose to harp on about the direction the industry is heading; I am just offering a perspective from my years of experience in the space. I spend my days working with the HeroEngine team making sure our technology fits the needs of online. We built our technology platform to support easy updating of content, rapid prototyping and development, and the kind of massively multiplayer interaction that is only possible in this medium.

THE NEW REPUBLIC

I am not placing a risky bet. I've seen too many waves of new technologies arrive. The pattern repeats. There are always very well financed companies that are well connected to the previous technology wave who develop major solutions that get it all wrong.

Let's see how things develop. Let's see if *Star Wars: the Old Republic* gets it right. Its developers started the project by licensing HeroEngine, so as to be able to take advantage of the rapid prototyping and easy updating our technology offers. If *SWTOR* can do things like stream constant new updates and find ways of consistantly engaging players, they'll be at the forefront of helping to push the industry in a new and exciting direction.

There are more than 1,000 teams building major and indie games on HeroEngine, using the new free HeroCloud service. I see a huge wave of new games coming out over the next year and beyond that will change the nature of games, by making them better, more fun and leveraging the strengths that only connected online games can have.

It's a new way to play.

Neil Harris is president and COO of Idea Fabrik, the company responsible for online game development technology HeroEngine. Harris has 30 years of experience working for giants of the games industry such as Commodore and Atari.

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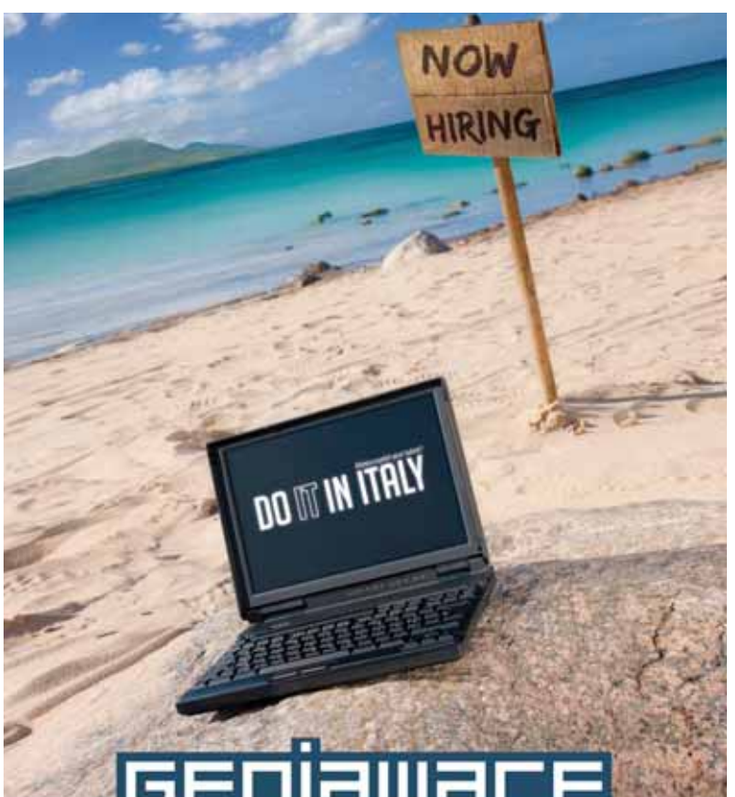

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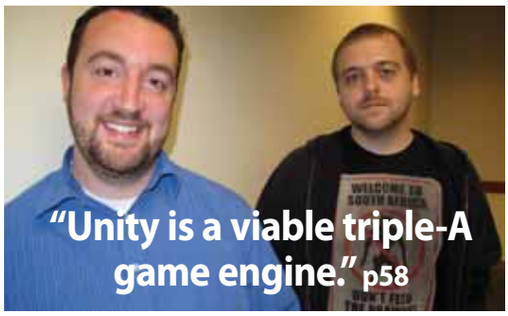

"Unity is a viable triple-A game engine." p58

The next step for animation

A look at NaturalMotion's latest release of its morpheme middleware and what it means for developers, p54

KEY RELEASE: Miles Sound System 9

p56

HEARD ABOUT: PS Vita

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Moving Forward

Middleware outfit and game developer NaturalMotion has released the latest version of its animation engine morpheme. **Will Freeman** asks CTO Simon Mack what makes a 'dot' update so significant

NaturalMotion's chief technology officer Simon Mack believes the new changes to morpheme can help both triple-A and mobile devs

What makes morpheme's 3.5 update especially significant, considering that it is in effect a 'dot' release?
Simon Mack, CTO: I guess we're a little conservative with our version numbers. Morpheme 3.5 has been a major project for us, and introduces features that will make a big difference to our customers.

We've introduced runtime retargeting and rescaling, which can provide substantial savings in production costs and memory usage for many developers. There have also been some very significant runtime performance optimisations, and for the first time we are supporting morpheme on iOS and Android devices.

How are the updates to a response to a changing development sector?
Our core market for morpheme has traditionally been triple-A console developers. As we're now a long way into the console cycle, these studios are really pushing the hardware so we've had to optimise the runtime even further to support them in this.

However, we're also seeing an increasing number of smaller studios, especially in Asia, who are less familiar with 3D character animation, but who want triple-A quality. This has led us to streamline and simplify many of our workflows and have our tools offer more assistance in setting up characters and animation networks. Many of these studios are also looking to reduce the number of assets they need to produce, which really drove us to focus on the runtime retargeting features.

> ***"We've seen a new set of platforms, including Vita and mobile devices, capable of high-end 3D experiences, and developers are keen to exploit this."***
>
> Simon Mack, NaturalMotion

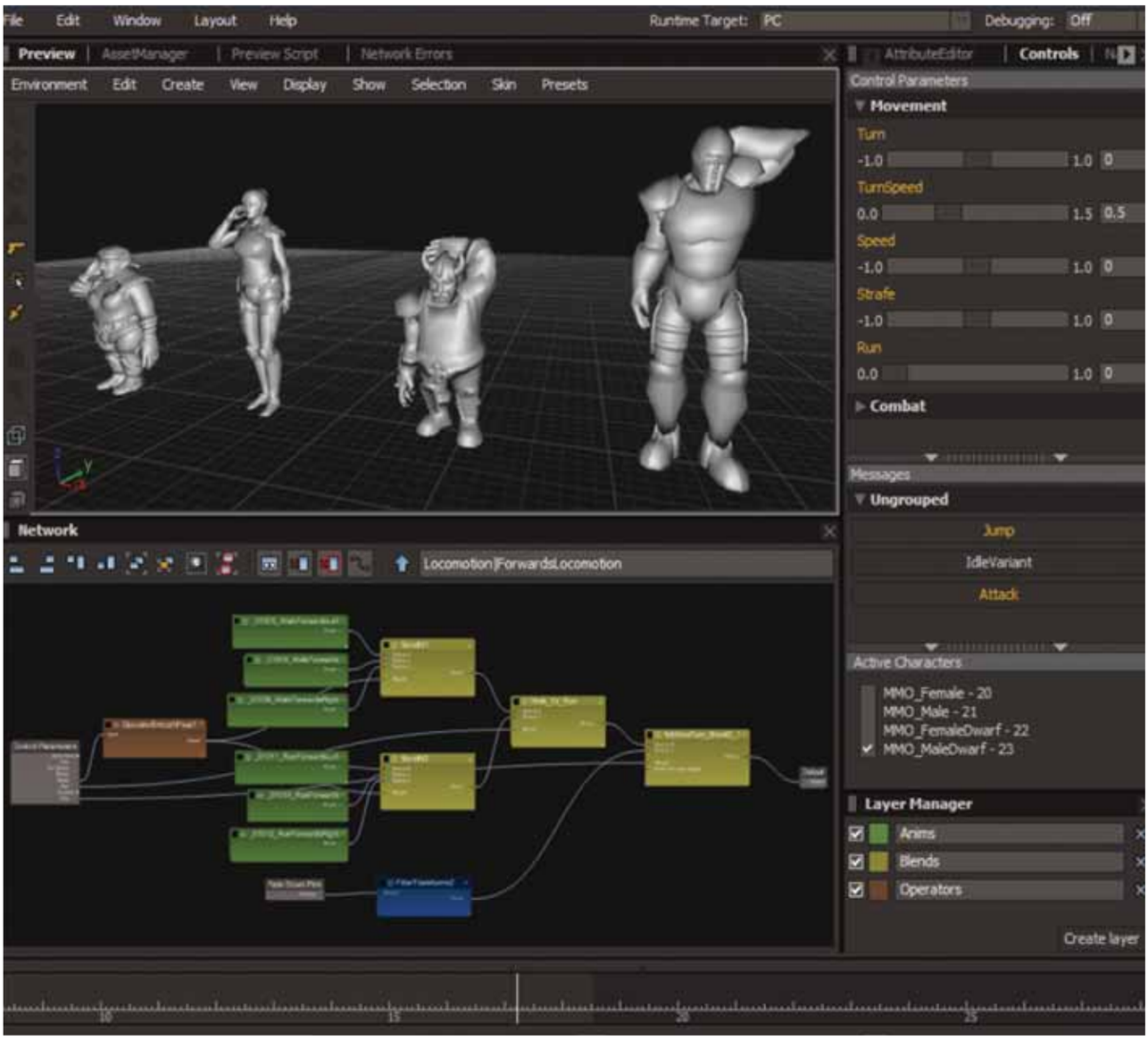
The other important change that has recently occurred has been the transition to mobile platforms. Developers are starting to push for better quality visuals on iOS and Android, and it will be interesting to see how the market for middleware on these platforms develops.

Runtime retargeting is perhaps the most significant addition to morpheme 3.5. Why is this significant, and how will it change things for developers 'in the field'?
Runtime retargeting allows animations created for one character to be applied to another at runtime. This means that you don't need to create and store different animations for each character in your game. The benefits of this are pretty substantial.

Animation production costs can be reduced as time doesn't have to be spent creating new animations or retargeting offline. Just as important, though, is that fewer animation clips have to be stored on disk and loaded at runtime. For games where download size is critical, or on platforms with tough memory limitations, this can make a big difference.

Of course, we always want to make sure developers have complete flexibility in how they work. Morpheme's node-based approach means that it's trivial to mix retargeted, shared animation and character-specific motions in one animation network.

How has 3.5 repositioned morpheme as a tool for new platforms and technologies?
It's always been important for us to support new platforms. If people are making games that need high-quality character animation,



NaturalMotion's animation engine morpheme 3.5 release adds sophisticated network logic to various features and also includes runtime retargeting

we want to be able to support them. What we've seen recently is a new set of platforms, including Vita and mobile devices, that are capable of high-end 3D experiences and developers are keen to exploit this. The benefits of dependable, powerful middleware are the same on these platforms as on more traditional consoles.

How does NaturalMotion's increasing position as a game developer impact the way you advance and develop your animation technology? Is there interplay between your tech and game teams?
As a technology provider, it's really useful to have an in-house customer. As we develop new morpheme features, we're able to have our animation team test them out straightaway. The same team is responsible for designing the animation networks used in our games, so they always have real-world feedback, which is invaluable.

Of course, we're always listening to our external customers as well. Many – possibly the majority – of morpheme's features are developed in response to feedback.

NaturalMotion Games is focused on building high-end mobile social games, and it's been the main driver behind our development of the iOS and Android versions of morpheme.

There are a lot of animation tools out there. Why should somebody choose morpheme 3.5?
Morpheme is a mature product used in a great range of projects. Our support team is second to none and ensures that not only do our customers have the best possible experience, but that the product is developed to solve the issues encountered by real games. I also believe that the quality of our tools outshine our competition, making it simple and intuitive to create even complex animation systems.

Finally, morpheme is the only system to provide developers a completely seamless mixing of animation blends, IK, retargeting, and physics simulation in a unified visually-authored network.

Why is the introduction of features that allow sophisticated network logic particularly important?
Morpheme animation networks are essentially trees of nodes connected together to define how animations are blended and modified by IK, physics or other procedural techniques. The creator of the animation network can define the input variables and messages that are used by the game to control the blends and state transitions. With morpheme version 3.5 we have added the ability for nodes in the network to themselves set those input parameters and send messages to the network. Logic that otherwise would have to live in game code can be brought into the animation system.

This is particularly useful when working with procedural animation. It's possible, for example, to have a node read the position of the character's hand and then use that to drive the head-look IK target. Our animation team has prototyped some pretty cool IK systems using this, and we're excited to see what our customers come up with.

And you feel optimistic about the future of morpheme 3.5 and the animation sector?
I think we're in an interesting time, not just for animation, but for game technology as a whole. On the one hand, we have the triple-A console teams pushing ever further in terms of quality and performance, and on the other, we have seen the growth of mobile developers just starting to find out what's possible with new hardware. As a middleware vendor, we have to make sure we can provide solutions that scale for everyone. For character animation, I'm confident that morpheme 3.5 does just that.
www.naturalmotion.com

KEY RELEASE

Will Freeman peers under the bonnet of Miles Sound System 9

WHAT IS IT? Miles Sound System 9
COMPANY: Rad Game Tools
PRICE: $5,000
www.radgametools.com/miles

Rad Games' lead developer Dan Thompson says the latest iteration of the Miles Sound System provides rapid iteration so sound designers can work on audio independent of programmer intervention

THERE are few game development solutions with a heritage to rival that of Rad Game Tools' Miles Sound System.

Originally released way back in 1991 for PC titles, it has now seen use on over 5,000 games across 14 platforms, making it one of the most prolific pieces of middleware in the industry's history.

And now a brand new build of the famous development tool is shipping that marks perhaps the most significant shift in the audio technology's makeup.

Miles Sound System 9 isn't entirely unlike its predecessors. Like previous versions it offers a comprehensive solution for managing audio in games, with streamlined content paths for rapid iteration. Where it differs, though, is in its high level audio toolset, which has undergone a significant redesign in the latest release.

ON CLOUD NINE

"Version 9 introduces Miles Studio, representing our approach to hands off sound authoring and debugging," explains the middleware's lead developer Dan Thompson. "Once again, rapid iteration is the focus, allowing sound designers to fill out and tweak audio events completely independent of programmer intervention."

Using the latest release of Miles, those sound designers can now capture a game's sound event stream and replay it as many times as they want. Additionally, all

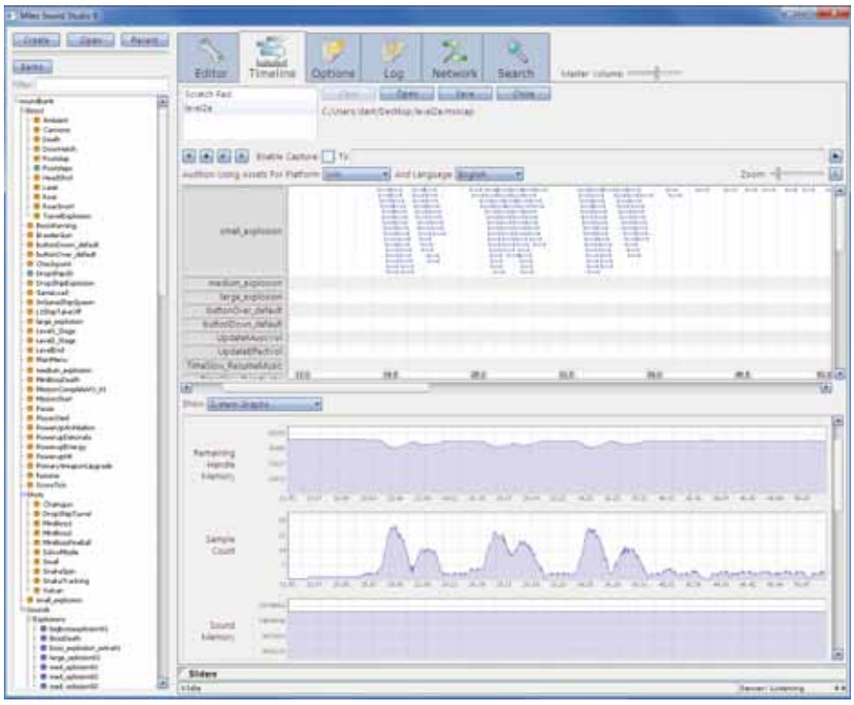
> ***"The ability to record and replay is big, as is the capability to debug and monitor the game's sound on the fly."***
>
> Dan Thompson, Rad Games

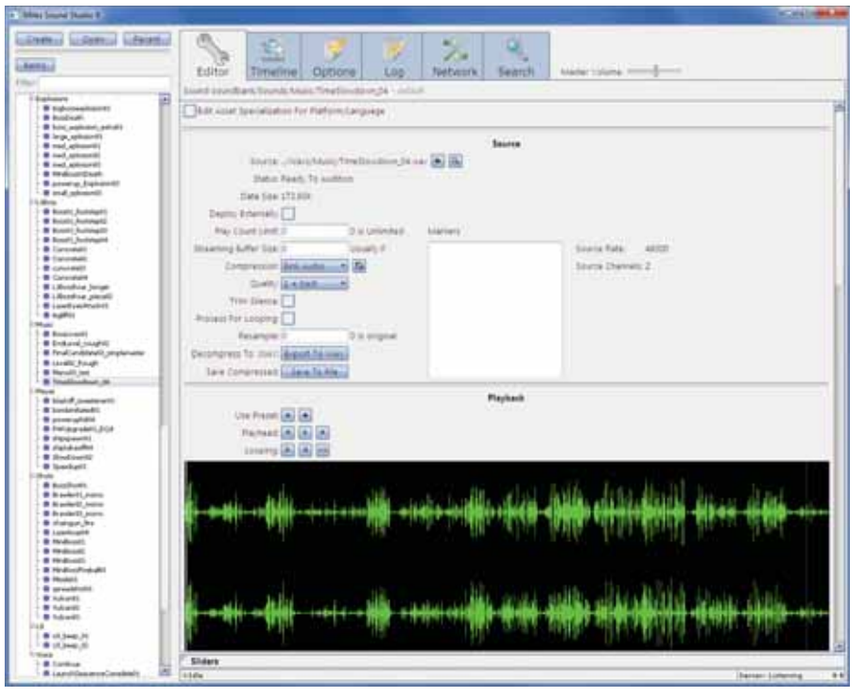
adjustment and sound set-up can be undertaken on the PC, with what is designed to be intuitive editing for audio presets, events, environments, filters, and mixing.

"Sound designers can then 'hot load' - testing, modifying, and mixing all aspects of the sound-scape in real time while playing their game," adds Thompson. "In addition, complete captures of the audio from the game can be recorded on to the timeline and replayed, tweaking areas that are difficult to consistently reach in-game.

"Being able to pause, make a change, and continue is huge – your sound designers don't have to reload the game just to try a new sound, or new effect chain, or whatever. It's really fun to work on audio this way."

Like many of the changes implemented in Miles Sound System 9, the introduction to hands-off sound authoring and debugging is a response to an industry increasingly





dominated by complexity. For the same reason, improvements to workflow – including Perforce integration, the addition of infinite undo, and new multi-selection functionality – have been applied to ease the processes involved in game audio.

DOWN THE LINE

Another new feature that Rad Game Tools has seen generate significant interest is the new timeline.

"As stated above, the ability to record and replay is big, as is the capability to debug and monitor the game's sound on the fly," says Thompson. "Memory usage, CPU usage, sample count and sound memory are all tracked and aligned with the timeline, so you can tell when things went sour, and what caused it."

The audio middleware firm is confident that the new version of its famous Miles Sound System series is the most robust and powerful that it has produced yet. Bolstered by its long heritage and relatively potent brand status, and thanks to its combining of the familiar lean Miles with the new various new features, further success looks certain for this well established member of the middleware hall of fame.

www.radgametools.com/miles

EPIC DIARIES

Mark Rein looks at Unreal Engine 3's role in Batman: Arkham City

Batman: Arkham City's sprawling depiction of Gotham was made possible by Rocksteady's previous experience with the Unreal Engine

IN THE wake of the mega-hit *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, Rocksteady Studios, in collaboration with Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, has released the game's highly anticipated sequel, *Batman: Arkham City*. Like its predecessor, the new title uses Unreal Engine 3 to push game consoles to their graphical limits, and the result is heart-stopping excitement in an immersive, massively interactive world.

Critics and players alike are heralding the game as an innovation in the genre, with *Game Informer* calling it "the best licenced video game ever made".

Paul Denning, senior programmer at Rocksteady Studios, attributes much of the success to the fact that the studio sets a very high bar in all they do. Its aim is to hire extremely talented individuals, helping to contribute to the company's overarching desire to deliver the best possible game from every perspective. And Unreal Engine 3 was a big part of doing just that with *Arkham City*.

THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

"Unreal Engine 3 is an amazingly powerful toolset," says Denning. "There are always new things to learn and new features being added. We had been using the Unreal Engine for about a year before we started *Arkham Asylum* and it really helped us learn how to tackle some of the key challenges in making a game of that style.

"However, without the experience of making *Arkham Asylum*, we'd never have been able to push the engine further for the sequel. System refinements coupled with the talent we have in the studio has allowed us to make a much richer world with more detail, characters and features than any other title we've ever made."

Part of the challenge of Rocksteady's overall vision for *Arkham City* was to add a living, breathing, open city as the centerpiece of the gaming experience. Denning reports that the team worked right up to deadline in order to perfect the world. Their goal was to deliver a complex game world, replete with detail, from neon lights in every district to dazzling effects lighting up all corners of the world, all while maintaining 30fps. The result, says Denning, isn't about the size, but about the level of detail, which he believes may be the most sophisticated in gaming so far.

"For *Arkham City* we spent quite some time on the Detective mode visuals," explains Denning. "In *Arkham Asylum*, we had the Detective materials draw behind the post-process layer and used base colours to allow them to punch through the blue tint. This led to a very limited color palette and blocked out models. For the sequel, we moved all the models that were highlighted into newly engineered layers that have given us so much more control over look and colour."

CONNECTING PEOPLE

According to Denning, one of the essential resources during the build was the Unreal Developer Network (UDN), which allowed the Rocksteady team to keep a close eye on key insights and solutions to challenges they encountered as well as offer their own advice and solutions when possible.

"Unreal Engine 3 makes so many areas of the game much simpler, yet at the same time more powerful, that we forgot how we even made games before learning some of the core areas of the engine," reveals Denning.

"The time I save writing code that a designer can now simply hook up in Kismet means I can focus my efforts writing those key little moments that really set our title apart from our competition. I wouldn't recommend anything else."

In addition to UDN, Denning found the monthly updates and upgrades to Unreal Engine 3 integral to the game's success.

"While no single innovation or improvement led to unique gameplay aspects, I can say that the multitude of upgrades we saw over the development cycle all went towards truly pushing the envelope of what is possible in a third-person action adventure," he says.

"We hope to be remembered as an outstanding game among the high-quality releases of the year. I'm most proud of delivering a fully-realised city at a solid 30fps that's more detailed and alive than any other game on the market with a graphical fidelity to rival any current generation game."

Judging from the overwhelmingly positive response to the game, that mission is complete.

At the time of writing, *Arkham City* is the second highest Metacritic-rated PS3 game of all time (96) and the fifth highest rated Xbox 360 game ever (95). In addition, four out of the top ten Metacritic-rated Xbox 360 games of all time and three of the top ten rated PS3 games use Unreal Engine technology.

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

DICE Summit
Las Vegas, USA
February 8th to 10th, 2012

Please email: ***licensing@epicgames.com*** *for appointments.*

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' *Unreal* engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

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Canadian-born **Mark Rein** is vice president and co-founder of Epic Games based in Cary, NC. Epic's Unreal Engine 3 has won *Game Developer* magazine's Best Engine Front Line Award five times along with entry into the Hall of Fame. UE3 has won four consecutive *Develop* Industry Excellence Awards. Epic is the creator of the mega-hit *Unreal* series of games and the blockbuster *Gears of War* franchise. Follow @MarkRein on Twitter.

UNITY FOCUS

The Bladeslinger studio on Unity's triple-A potential

BLADESLINGER
Developer: Luma Arcade
Platform: iOS, Android
What is it? A triple-A mobile game to rival Shadowgun
www.lumaarcade.com

Luma Arcade general manager Sam (above, left) and Frank Thomas Buscaglia (above, right) say they are happy with Unity's support on the Bladeslinger project

MADFINGER'S shooter *Shadowgun* quickly became the most famous example of the potential of Unity as a platform for creating triple-A content on mobile.

Now, there's a new contender on the block for the title of most polished Unity-authored game. Steampunk western *Bladeslinger* – by South African headquartered studio Luma Arcade – debuted at this year's Unite, and was cited directly by Unity as an example of the engine's potential to deliver experiences once reserved for consoles.

GO WESTERN

"*Bladeslinger* has been a pet project of our studio for quite a while now," explains Luma Arcade's general manager Sam Williams. "It's something we wanted to build around a couple of years ago, so we started kicking around the idea back then and thought it would really be something we'd have to make on PC or console, given the graphical quality we wanted to hit and the level of immersive story we wanted to achieve."

However, the Luma team, which works from bases in Johannesburg, Las Vegas, San Francisco and Portland, quickly began to notice the rise in power of mobile devices, and realised that they could join those spearheading portable devices' advance on traditional console territory.

"We started to build the game from the ground up for mobile when we entered development," reveals Williams. "The touch interface of so many mobile devices seemed like a natural fit so we went for it."

Committed to working for iOS and Android, the Luma Arcade team quickly set their heart on Unity. That positioned them in a unique spot; they were poised to lead the pack in terms of high-end Unity projects, but they would have to work at the forefront of the engine's abilities.

"The common concerns about Unity as a triple-A engine are dead on," admits a frank Thomas Buscaglia, who serves as Luma Arcade's senior designer.

> ***"What Luma Arcade has managed to do with Unity is amazing. It marks another step forward for mobile."***
>
> Joachim Ante, Unity

He adds: "Things like 'the bigger the project gets the larger the team needs to be' means you need version control to be able to pull it off."

"But, with 3.5 Unity is changing things, so it's no longer a binary format for prefabs and scenes and stuff, which is a huge help because you can actually merge work and allow two people to work on a scene at a time and stuff like that.

"In the same way, you would think that the lack of source access would be a problem, but so far it hasn't been. And it hasn't been a problem because of how responsive Unity's been. There are a lot of engine companies out there that don't provide that level of service. I wholly believe in Unity as a viable triple-A game engine."

AN EASY DECISION

Luma Arcade has used Unity for numerous previous projects, meaning that adopting the tech for *Bladeslinger* took little thought.

"We've always been happy with Unity," confirms Williams. "They have been happy to throw engineers at something if we have an awesome idea that they like. That has really helped with *Bladeslinger*. They'll take our ideas and work them into the engine."

"And Unity's ability to enable rapid prototyping was really important to us because we weren't sure exactly how this game was going to work interface-wise," adds Buscaglia. "Being able to rapidly iterate was great. That's one of Unity's main strengths."

Take a look at *Bladeslinger* in motion, and it's clear that Luma Arcade made the right choice of game engine. The glossy, slick action game absolutely rivals many modern console games, and clearly the Unity team are happy with how the engine has been used too.

"*Bladeslinger* marks another step forward for mobile platforms," claimed Unity CTO Joachim Ante. "What Luma Arcade has managed to do with Unity is amazing. This is one of the best looking mobile games we've ever seen and we're psyched that it was designed using our technology."

HEARD ABOUT

John Broomhall asks Jason Page, senior audio manager at SCEE R&D, for the facts about PS Vita's audio capabilities

SO WHAT'S under the hood that you can talk about? What is Vita capable of?
There's two sides to the audio processing on PS Vita: the ARM processing and the codec engine processing.

The ARM side processing is also where the main game is processed, so it has been very important to keep CPU use to a minimum here.

The codec engine is where the serious audio processing happens – mixing, resampling, DSP processing, and such like. I can't go into too much detail regarding the hardware, but suffice to say, it's very powerful.

Developers are not allowed direct access to the codec engine, as with the PSP's 'Media Engine'. As such, we had to ensure that the design of Next-Gen Synth took this into consideration. We needed to allow the synth to be configurable – synth DSP module routing and bus routing, for example – and we made sure that we'd include the high-priority DSP effects as standard, as it wouldn't be possible for developers to write their own on the codec engine. This is another major reason why we needed feedback from middleware developers at an early stage.

It's probably worth noting that developers can just write their own synth on the ARM processors if they wish. However, NGS's use of the codec engine allows for far more processing to be available for game (graphics and AI) use.

How about memory and storage for audio?
There's no actual audio memory – similar to both PS3 and PSP – and we've got a number of codecs that allow for compression ratios that are comparative with that of current gen memory footprints.

From speaking to many developers, we concluded that a budget of somewhere around 20MB for current gen audio assets is quite normal (RAM being reserved for in-game sound effects, streaming audio buffers and such). We needed to ensure that, where possible, developers could dedicate the same RAM budget on Vita and achieve similar results.

Will it deliver PS3 quality audio?
It really depends what PS3 games with which you want to compare the audio capabilities of Vita and NGS. But the goal was to allow our own WWS PS3 titles to work on it with minimal changes.

In terms of power, games process hundreds of audio channels, as well as processing high quality reverbs, etcetera. We consider that a 'game voice' would have resampling, volume changing, filter and some kind of codec decoding all being active. So when I say that NGS can process hundreds of audio channels, I mean real 'game voice' audio channels.

> ***"In terms of fidelity, it's up there with the PS3, and in terms of scope, I think that the synth design is actually more flexible."***
>
> Jason Page, SCEE

The main audio difference is obviously that it's a portable unit with stereo output, rather than full-fat 7.1. But in terms of fidelity, I'd say it's up there with the PS3, and in terms of scope, I think that the synth design is actually more flexible, allowing for wider opportunities for creativity than that of PS3 in the longer term.

Of course, PS3 is a home console. It plugs into the mains and has a fan to keep it from overheating. Vita is a portable, battery powered unit and as such, you have to be sensible when making comparisons between the two.

I see it like this: if you used the whole PS3 to do something amazing with audio, then yes, the PS3 delivers more. But if you consider what resources are normally available for game audio on a home console (memory, CPU use, DSPs), then without a doubt, Vita can deliver to that level.

Is it fair to say it's redefining handheld audio? If so, why, and what do you think will be the long term effect on other devices?
With regards to the long-term knock-on effect, portable audio can no longer be seen as the 'simpler option' or the 'poorer relation' compared to that of the home consoles. In future, the budgets for portable game audio may indeed rise to meet that of home consoles, although re-using assets across the two will also be a viable option, and as such could make portable console development easier overall.

Does Vita redefine portable audio? I think so, yes. If you look at current portable devices, their audio capabilities are around 15 years behind that of home consoles. So, comparing the audio capabilities of Vita to other portables on the market, be that mobile phones or other game orientated devices, Vita's audio is a staggering achievement. Overall, such developments should allow for better game audio, leading to a better experience. Whatever 'better' means is up to the developer, but Vita certainly gives them the power do something rather special.

To read an extended version of this interview, visit www.develop-online.net

SCEE R&D senior audio manager Jason Page believes that the PS VIta has the capability to compete with the PS3 with its impressive audio tech

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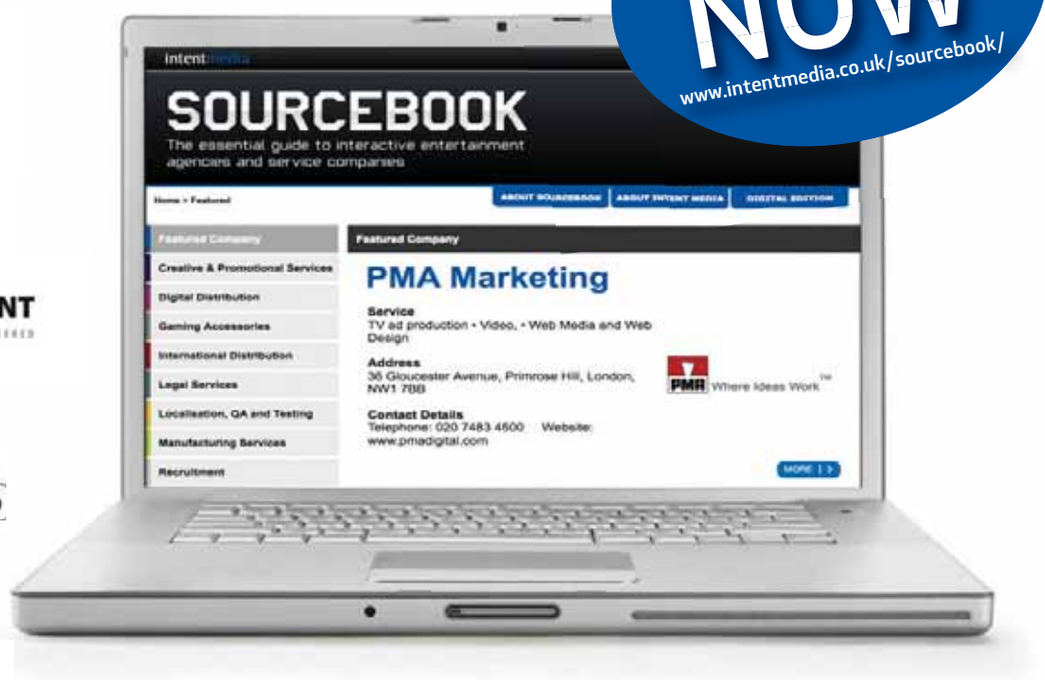

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The world's premier listing of games development studios, tools, outsourcing specialists, services and courses...

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SERVICES SPOTLIGHT:
Axis Animation
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KEY CONTACTS

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RECRUITER HOT SEAT

We quiz Codemaster's **Simon Miles** on the studio's recruitment policy and the dos and don'ts to land a job

What does your company offer that makes you stand out from others?
The number one attraction is that Codemasters works on world leading triple-A titles, with cutting edge, in-house built technology. Not many companies are building their own tech anymore, whereas building our own is part of company strategy. Our brands are big enough to deserve a lot of hand crafted, dedicated work.

In addition, our art department is immensely respected for its visual direction and presentation style. Our audio department has phenomenal attention to detail; just listen to what's going on in *Dirt 3* or *F1 2011*.

What are the other perks?
Both our UK offices offer something for everyone. Our Southam HQ is very near Leamington Spa with all of its amenities including a plethora of bars, clubs and restaurants, but at the same time has plenty of rural space and stunning parks and gardens. Our Birmingham Studio is in the heart of the city itself with all a major city has to offer. Be warned though, the amount of shopping available can be very damaging on the wallet.

I've got to also mention our onsite pub. Yep, a fully licensed public house called the Masters Arms with a lakeside outdoor sitting area.

Who is the best interviewee you've ever had and what did they do?
I couldn't give one specific example, but the best you usually know as they step through the door. Immediately bright, personable, a wide range of

BIO
Name: Simon Miles
Title: Talent acquisition manager
www.codemasters.co.uk

GET THAT JOB

We ask recruiters how you can score that promotion or move to a new role

THIS MONTH: PLAYFISH, LEAD DEVELOPER

"At Playfish, being able to think outside of your 'game' is a great skill. This involves experience of writing common bits of tech that can benefit other teams as well as your own.

"In line with that, the ability to code selflessly, and not reinvent the wheel is a must. This means that you should be able to write maintainable code, and have the skills to make useful existing code generic (especially if written by other devs).

"Another hugely important skill is the ability to thoroughly test your code. This involves using test driven development, and automating the process in CI.

"Experience of balancing technical improvement alongside business requirements is important. It's often hard to do during tight iterations, but worth the investment. If you don't love your code, you're not going to enjoy working with it.

"Finally, being friendly and a great team player goes a long way."

Campbell Wilson,
Game Server Director, Playfish

SIX-SECOND STUDIO SPOTLIGHT

- Lucid Games was founded February 2011
- It is an independent studio based in Liverpool
- Formed by senior management team of Bizarre Creations following its closure
- Since February the studio has looked to fill 50 posts and is still recruiting new staff
- Specialises in interactive content and launch platform development
- The studio states its mission is to create games 'for fun, quality and simplicity'

www.lucidgames.co.uk

knowledge and an enthusiasm for games themselves. But they are also very well prepared and know about the company history.

So what was the worst interview?
One guy turned up and at the start of the interview said that he had accepted a job elsewhere and he was only here because he promised the agent he would attend. At least we kept the interview short.

We have also noticed a trend that the more intelligent a person may be the less they seem to understand dates and calendars and we often get people turning up for interviews a week too early or a week too late. Luckily all of those people manage to turn up to work on time as we employed most of them after the initial hiccup.

What is your advice for a successful interview?
Be prepared, that will ease the nerves. If you're a coder, by all means revise your subject, that does no harm and is a good excuse to brush up. Everything else from there is about what sort of person you are and where we see you fitting into our company. Interviewers should always ask 'have you got any questions yourself?' at the end.

Have a checklist of questions that you go through and tick off during the interview if they come up. That way, you look organised, have thought about a few things and then if you really have nothing else to ask – point to your list and say 'I think we've already discussed them all'.

My other tip would be many interviews end and you really aren't sure whether they are genuinely interested in the role or not. Therefore if you are interested, don't be afraid to tell us.

With so many developers self-publishing these days, why should they join a big studio like Codemasters?
We are a big studio, there's no doubt about that, and you really need to be a team player to get on in that type of atmosphere. You need that scale to make great products with the production values we have. The good thing about Codemasters is that we have leadership and expert roles.

If you want to become an expert in, say, physics, there is nothing stopping you from becoming a principal programmer in that area – be a leading expert and mentor others in that area. If you want to see the wider picture then there are group lead and lead roles as well as eventually the more senior technical director roles.

> ***"The best interviewees are bright, personable, have a wide range of knowledge and an enthusiasm for games."***

What area of the industry needs investment?
If the UK is to compete with the rest of the world we've got to be careful we don't stray too far from our heritage. Understanding the underlying hardware and being inventive with limited resources has been one of the UK's strengths.

NEW STUDIO ALERT!

A new digitally-focused independent outfit called West Pier has been formed from five ex developers of the now defunct Disney studio Black Rock.

The founders of the Brighton-based studio are Vassos Shiarlis, Craig Gabell, Joe Palmer, Dominic Jackson and Huw Bowles.

"Historically focused on triple-A console development, the West Pier directors are making the jump over to online and mobile games," read a statement from the company.

More info at:
www.westpierstudio.com

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

This month: New and digital studios hiring young talent and industry veterans

NDREAMS ■ Publisher nDreams has hired programmer **ADAM FAHEY**, artist **ASH SPARLING**, audio designer **MATT CASSON** and junior artist **CHRIS WILLIAMS**.

Ash Sparling, previously an artist at Rare, TT Games and Outso, will work on Home costumes, companions and envrionments in the studio's upcoming projects.

Chris Williams has been made junior artist, having worked there as a volunteer and intern, and will be working on modelling and environments, including on the studio's first Home clubhouse.

Adam Fahey meanwhile joins from Relentless, whilst Matt Casson has been appointed to the audio team after studying a degree in popular music and record production.

nDreams CEO Patrick O'Luanaigh said: "We're building a highly talented, creative and enthusiastic team here at nDreams, with an unusual penchant for Nerf guns and strange headwear, and we're delighted to welcome Adam, Ash, Chris and Matt into the family.

THUMBSTAR ■ Ubisoft Reflections execs **MARTIN** and **GARETH EDMONDSON** have been appointed executive roles at new mobile games studio Thumbstar.

Gareth has taken up the role of CEO at the firm, whilst Martin has been hired as chief creative officer.

The Liverpool headquartered company is opening a Newcastle division for the brothers to lead, with the studio focusing on developing game content, IP and other mobile games content for business partners.

"I am very excited by the prospect of what we can create together at Thumbstar, not only by adding our own internal development team, but by expanding our network of third-party developers and using high quality content to grow our distribution channels even further," said Gareth.

Martin, who was one of the original investors in Thumbstar when it was founded in 2008, added: "I am very proud to have been involved with Thumbstar since its formation.

"I'm now particularly looking forward to getting back to my primary passion for original IP creation in such a dynamic and rapidly growing space."

The brothers have both previously led the Newcastle-based Ubisoft Reflections studio in separate spells, and they were both at the firm during the development of the recent *Driver: San Francisco*.

LIGHTNING FISH GAMES ■ Motion tracking specialists Lightning Fish Games has appointed husband and wife **EWA** and **ROBERT AGUERO PADILLA** to work on its Flash team.

Ewa has been hired as Flash designer, where she will be responsible for designing interfaces for console games and putting together assets and animations.

Robert meanwhile, who has previously worked on titles such as *Operation Flashpoint: Red River* whilst also working on his own games, will take up the role of senior Flash programmer at the studio.

"I really enjoy waking up each morning to join a great team and work on big titles, and go back home in the evening, where I can continue development of my small home titles together with my wife," says Robert.

The studio has worked on titles such as the *Let's Dance with Mel B* and *NewU Fitness* series of games.

NGMOCO ■ Crytek's **TONY DAVIS**, game director of Kinect title *Ryse*, has quit the studio to join ngmoco Sweden.

He joins the smartphone publisher as senior designer, having previously worked on titles such as *Crysis* and *Crysis 2* as producer and level designer.

The digital firm has also appointed Crytek's former art director Vesselin Efremov, who will take up the role of senior artist.

TOOLS SPOTLIGHT

This month: **Jury Rig Software**

Jury Rig Software is the new middleware company behind memory manager platform Elephant.

Formed in May 2010, the young tool provider says its team are all seasoned professionals and they have experience of working on almost every gaming platform over the last 15 years.

Company director Darren Vine says the company was established to fill a gap in the memory allocator market, after it found that other tools in the space were lacking in many areas, particularly in bug tracking solutions.

"Memory issues are some of the hardest to track down and we aim to make that easier," explains Vine. "Our goal is to provide middleware that fits in seamlessly with the developer's game to let them focus on the areas that matter to them."

He adds that Jury Rig's ambition is to help devs get the most out of the memory available to them.

"By providing superior tools we aim to reduce the time they spend debugging memory issues, allowing them to produce better games."

The tool provider's Elephant memory manager, available for all major platforms, has been created to match these aims, and the needs of the industry it serves. Designed specifically for games, Vine says it comes with features not usually provided by current memory software, including heaps and pools and advanced debugging aids to track down leaks and errors. It also comes packaged with visual tool Goldfish, which makes it easier to track a game's memory usage in real time and trace errors quickly.

Vine believes middleware is becoming increasingly more important as games grow and the costs of developing them increase, and that Elephant is able to meet industry demands. He also reveals that Jury Rig Software is willing to adapt to satisfy the needs of its customers.

> ***"If a feature is requested, we can normally have it implemented for the customer in a matter of hours."***
>
> Darren Vine, Jury Rig

"By providing small, high quality middleware we can adapt to the needs of our clients quickly," he says. "Our software can be integrated and running within minutes across multiple platforms. Elephant is flexible to the needs of the developer and the hardware. If a feature is requested, we can normally have it implemented for the customer in a matter of hours."

He adds Jury Rig's ambition is to help developers get the most out of the memory available to them.

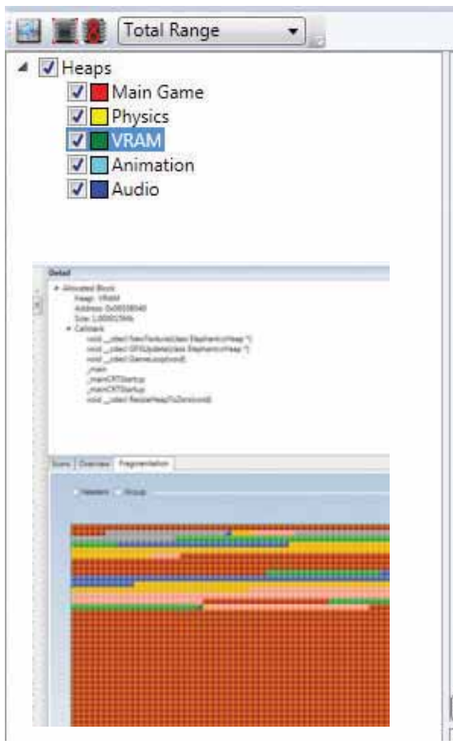
"By providing superior tools we aim to reduce the time they spend debugging memory issues, allowing them to produce better games," he says.

Elephant has been used on games such as Egosoft's PC bound space trading and combat simulator *X Rebirth*, along with many other titles being readied for 'a wide range of platforms' all due for release in 2012.

The next step for the middleware provider is to bring the tools to Android and iOS, which Vine says will be available shortly for trial directly from the company's website. He added that Jury Rig will also soon be updating to a new version that that will include: "many new features to help with debugging and data gathering."

Indie developers can purchase the software from $413, whilst larger commercial studios can license the tool from $1,650. Two per cent of all purchases go to UK charity SpecialEffect.

www.juryrigsoftware.com



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Jury Rig Software company director Darren Vine says the firm created Elephant in response to a lack of quality tools in the memory allocator space

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TRAINING SPOTLIGHT

This month: **Twofour54**

A NEW GAMING academy is being built in Abu Dhabi in partnership with Ubisoft that plans to take on its first full-time students next year on March 26th.

The industry education institute is part of the region's twofour54 initiative to enable the development of 'world-class' Arabic media and entertainment content.

The games programme is vocationally oriented and is an 18-month intensive program tailored to the needs of the new Ubisoft development studio to be established in the region as part of the deal. It has also been designed to match the needs of the broader emerging games development industry across the Middle East and North Africa.

The course focuses primarily on games programming skills, but also provides students with a foundation in games design and games art, with a focus on skills including C++, XNA and various scripting tools. There are also foundation units in AI, 3D, games art and games design available to prospective pupils.

The program has been designed to have a 'strong emphasis' on practical learning, with students expected to produce working games and tools from their first trimester.

Pupils are also taught skills in project management, whilst there is potentially the opportunity for them to work across other disciplines with their counterparts at the global School of Audio Engineering, which also partners the academy, in animation, audio, film or multimedia.

Those on the course will be able to take advantage of Ubisoft's expertise from an impressive 25 years in the industry, with developers from the studio providing guidance, tools and job opportunities to students.

> ***"Digital gaming is a priority sector for us and to partner with Ubisoft is great news for the region."***
>
> Wayne Borg, Twofour54

Twofour54 COO Wayne Borg says that the deal with the French publisher means that the region can now start to build its gaming infrastructure, whilst also being able to develop, and more importantly retain, its home-grown talent.

"Digital gaming has always been a priority sector for twofour54 and to partner with an international market leader such as Ubisoft is great news for the region's gaming industry," says Borg.

"The digital games played by Arabs have traditionally been developed outside the region, which means that they rarely have a direct relevance to Arab gamers.

"Our agreement with Ubisoft will benefit the region in that it will enable the development of titles with universal appeal, whilst also building the skills of young Arabs to allow the region to create its own games and develop a gaming industry base here at twofour54."

Ubisoft executive director Christine Burgess-Quémard adds that the demographics and the pool of skilled technical talent in the Middle East and North Africa region are the "key factors" that will contribute to the success of its new studio, which it hopes will have 100 staff within the next five years.

"Their commitment to developing a strong regional gaming industry and their knowledge of the region were the perfect foundation on which to continue building our development teams," says Burgess-Quémard.

Yannick Theler, whose previous roles include VP of business development for Ubisoft's China activities and human resources director of Ubisoft Shanghai, has been chosen to run the new studio.

twofour54.com

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Ubisoft's Yannick Theler will lead the French publisher's new studio in Abu Dhabi as as part of the company's partnership with Twofour54

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SERVICES SPOTLIGHT

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Axis Animation
Suite 225 Pentagon Centre,
Washington Street,
Glasgow, G3 8AZ

T: 0141 572 2802
E: enquiries@axisanimation.com
W: www.axisanimation.com

AXIS ANIMATION is a Scottish studio that specialises in the animation for trailers, commercials and cut scenes.

Founded in 2000, the company now has a 45-strong work force and its success has led to the creation of sister company Flaunt, established in 2009, that specialises in characters, comedy and humour for a more family oriented market.

Axis has worked on games such as *Mass Effect 2*, *GRID*, *Brink* and *Killzone*, but it is perhaps best known for its work on the famous *Dead Island* trailer, winning awards, such as the *Develop* Visual Outsourcer accolade last June, and industry-wide critical acclaim for its efforts.

Such was the success of the *Dead Island* trailer, Axis executive producer Richard Scott says that it has led to the company striking new deals in the industry, as well as being picked up by Ridley Scott's Little Minx/RSA Films for commercial directing.

Despite being based in Scotland, the studio claims to do most of its work for US companies. Scott explains its success across the pond comes down to the quality of its service and taking advantage of opportunities that have arisen over the years.

"Once you have your first opportunity and you offer a great creative service and have a good time making it happen, then the recommendations start," says Scott.

As well as production on large projects, Scott says the company also recognises the need to work on smaller titles with the industry shifting away from big games and studios, particularly in the UK.

"Different types of games need different types of marketing and promotion, but we are still firm believers that they do need to be marketed so we've been speaking to developers about those types of titles and how we could help them create content," explains Scott.

Going forward Axis is planning to develop its capabilities with real-time engines, such as the tech used in *007 Bloodstone's* cut scenes.

"This is an area we see for growth, our clients are requesting it and we are now building a team to specialise in that area. The good news for clients is that they still get access to all the great Axis directors and will have a dedicated team who are specialists in real-time."

www.axisanimation.com

Axis Animation received worldwide acclaim from developers, gamers and those outside the industry for its now infamous Dead Island trailer

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A sideways look at the games industry

THE INDUSTRY IN 140 CHARACTERS

A month in tweets by the industry elite

@ian_livingstone
I'm truly honoured to be going to Bournemouth University today to receive an honorary Doctor of Arts. A model Uni for the UK @bouremouthuni
(Ian Livingstone, Eidos)
Wednesday, November 9th

@therealcliffyb
Getting upset about buyable horse armor is like getting mad at Disneyland for offering to buy Mickey Mouse hats once inside the park.
(Cliff Bleszinkski, Epic Games)
Friday, November 18th

@tom_watson
Late, late night playing *Portal 2*. Early, early morning drafting questions and listening to The Clash on full blast. #brandnewcadillac
(Tom Watson, UK MP)
Thursday, November 10th

@millsustwo
Social media is doing my head in. Every talented arsehole in the world thinks they deserve fame time... I need to escape... need peace.
(Mills, Ustwo)
Friday, November 18th

@notch
My wife is studying. She read to me from her book of famous philosophers. I felt like I was playing mental *QWOP*.
(Markus Persson, Mojang)
Tuesday, November 15th

@gamesbrief
Whenever asked to comment on Nintendo, I always end with "it's a foolish analyst who bets against Nintendo" #bgf2011
(Nicholas Lovell, Gamesbrief)
Friday, November 18th

@HarmonixSean
Dear PETA, Mario has been wearing the raccoon suit for like 25 years. Yet you fail to mention that he curb stomps turtles.
(Sean Baptiste, Harmonix)
Tuesday, November 15th

@SpiralChris
You'd have to have very high standards to think there were no good game stories. It's like saying there's no good plays since Shakespeare.
(Chris Bateman, International Hobo)
Thursday, November 24th

@adrianchm
So, the reports of the death of Single Player games have been greatly exaggerated. #skyrim #batman #deusex #darksouls #skywardsword
(Adrian Chmielarz, People Can Fly)
Wednesday, November 16th

@BinaryTweedDeej
I really hope everyone at Sonic Team is forced to play *Rayman Origins*. Most enjoyable and polished 2D platformer since *Super Mario World*.
(DeeJay, Binary Tweed)
Sunday, November 27th

AN OPEN MIND

BRENDAN MCNAMARA

based on his line on bullying and rude names for Shanghai

Telling Eurogamer that Team Bondi isn't a terrorist organisation: "We had a TV show in Australia, which was showing people who used to work on *L.A. Noire* with their faces blacked out and their voices changed. I was sitting there thinking, hang on, this isn't the IRA. They didn't enjoy working at the place and they don't like me as their boss. Okay, but we made a video game. It was a difficult and terrible process, but nobody died making it.

Appearing smitten as he tells the 2011 Bradford Animation festival about mo-cap talent: "This guy's name is Nathan Lovejoy. He's got a great name. He's a really good up-and-coming Aussie actor. He's six-foot-eight, so he's rather a large lad."

Revealing to the the same festival about fictional colleagues: "I personally believe that it is easier to work with real people because you can discuss with them what you want."

IT FIGURES: ZYNGA'S BAD MONTH

As November drew to a close, things started to look a little tough for that oft criticised developer Zynga. *The New York Times* suggested that *Angry Birds* studio Rovio allegedly rejected a buyout from Zynga worth around **$2.25 billion**, and went on report that "**two** people with **first** hand knowledge" claimed that another deal with PopCap, worth **$950 million** in cash, was rejected. Data also emerged that stated Zynga's *Mafia Wars 2* had lost **900,000** users since October. The Facebook title had peaked at **2.5 million users**, and occupied the workload of **80** staff **one year** previously, but the AppData research suggested that less than **ten per cent** of its players are returning to play the game everyday. The online games giant had apparently targeted a retention rate of **double** that at **20 per cent**. The same month, EA's head of HR Gabrielle Toledano claimed that Zynga's imminent IPO could lead to a mass exodus of many of the company's **3,000** staff.

THE EGO TRIP

We ask some of the finest game development talent a series of questions about the toughest subject of all – their own work

THIS MONTH: Sean Murray
MOST FAMOUS FOR:
The Joe Danger games
ANSWERING QUESTIONS ON:
Joe Danger

What was the parody genre-title that became associated with *Joe Danger*?
We came up with that one, and I think we went with 'Stunt 'Em-Up'. We claimed *Joe Danger* was the first 'Stunt ' Em-Up'. It's a bit of a weird genre, so I don't think it will catch on. **CORRECT**

Why don't some publishers like giant coins?
Oh yes. I think they feel that they are not realistic enough. There's no way I was going to forget that one; that was something a potential publisher said to us about the game. That's sticking with me. **CORRECT**

In the first press release about *Joe Danger*, a childhood toy was metaphorically set on fire to capture a sense of what the game offered. What liquid was used for this?
Is that an obscure way of asking about lighter fluid? It's lighter fluid. I used to make Airfix kits, and my brother would fill them with cotton wool and lighter fluid, set them on fire and then throw them out the window. **CORRECT**

What was the exact date of the North American PSN release of *Joe Danger*?
That would be June 8th 2010. That one is etched in my memory. That was far to intense a period not to remember. **CORRECT**

A particular toy was used in your studio as a powerful demonstration of game concepts. What was that toy?
Oh god. I think that was Grant's Lion-O toy. We had a box of those toys. **INCORRECT:**
(*Optimus Prime* was the toy in question)

Four new characters were introduced to the game as DLC. Can you name them all?
What were their actual names? This could stump me. It was Chuckles the Chimp, Sir Bonehead, Chicken Joe, and then an Indian called either Joe Ronimo or Geronim-Joe. It was Geronim-Joe. **CORRECT**

LEADERBOARD

1. Charles Cecil (5/6)
1. Sean Murray (5/6)
3. Martin Hollis (4/6)

Sean is now level at the top of the leaderboard with Revolution Software man Charles Cecil. Check back next month to see if our next contestant can reach the perfect score.

develop FORWARD PLANNER

FEBRUARY 2012

Recruitment Special
Our annual analysis of the jobs market includes: Advice for CVs, portfolios and interviews; per-discipline guidance on getting a promotion; the education sector; our salary survey; and much, much more

Salary Survey
Dissecting the data to see how industry salaries are changing

Regional Focus: Cambridge
An overview of current developments and new stories from the historic University town

MARCH 2012

Game Engines
A detailed look at the evolution and diversification of the game engine, with analysis of the key trends and technologies from the sector's most experienced professionals

Regional Focus: Middle East
A focus on one of the emerging development markets and what it could mean for the rest of the industry

Event:
GDC – March 5th to March 9th

APRIL 2012

QA and Localisation
We take an in-depth look at this essential element of the games development process

Regional Focus: China
An examination of this rising sector, and the influence it is having on the wider industry

MAY 2012

With Develop 100 insertion

Audio Special
A detailed summary of music and audio for the games sector, from in-house teams through to outsourcers

Regional Focus: Australia
A look at how the troubled sector has coped with recent closures and how it will progress in the future

Event:
Develop Quiz – May 16th
Nordic Game – May 23rd to May 25th

JUNE 2012

AI focus
A breakdown of the evolution of AI tools and technology, and the trends and developments dominating a sector that is starting to cross over with numerous related disciplines

Regional Focus: North East UK

Event
E3 2012 – June 5th to June 7th
UBIQ – June 18th to June 19th

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amiqus
We Know Your World

THE FAQ PAGE: CHRIS LEE

Develop grills respected figures from the global games industry

Chris Lee believes developers need to deliver titles for non-gamers as well as the medium's traditional audience

Who are you and what do you do?
I'm Chris Lee and I'm COO for a new social game publisher called Hooplo. I'm also non-executive director for Relentless Software and Future Games of London.

I've spent the last few years building innovative game development firms such as Media Molecule and FreeStyleGames. I enjoy bringing new IP to market. It's exciting to now do this across social and mobile platforms, as well as console and connected TVs.

What are you working on right now?
Hooplo partner with third-party teams to publish games across social networks. We have over five million monthly active players. We have in-house product management, analytics, design and localisation expertise, which we leverage for our development partners. We have an exciting slate of new games launching over the next few months, with big announcements planned.

Future Games of London (FGOL) is about to release its new IP *Grabatron* on iOS and Android in December. FGOL has a network of over 26 million users after great success with IP such as *Hungry Shark*, *Pool Bar* and *Snooker Club*. We're expecting *Grabatron* to light up the charts for Christmas.

> ***We don't do enough as an industry to encourage and foster new talent, whether that's graduates or smaller indies looking to build an exciting new company.***

Relentless has just announced its partnership with Microsoft and National Geographic to develop a groundbreaking project and a huge leap forward in the way people will engage with interactive TV content.

What was the first video game or product that you ever worked on in the industry?
In the early 90s I was fortunate enough to work with teams such as Rare, Software Creations and DMA Design. I worked for a company called MultiGen Paradigm and provided software and technical support for a tool chain called NinGen, which was later called GameGen. This was back in 1994 and we became part of what Nintendo called the 'Dream Team', which was a group of developers and tool providers focused on delivering innovation on N64.

What was the first video game you ever played, and did you enjoy it?
I was hooked on *Revs* and *Match Day* on the BBC Micro. I was in awe of them in the 80s and still am. *Revs* taught me how to change gears and *Match Day* showed me that my dad would always be a formidable and highly competitive video game opponent. Both bits of learning have proven extremely valuable in later life.

What is your favourite game ever, and for what reason?
Tough to pick one, but being impartial and choosing something I wasn't involved in, it would have to be *Ico*. The way it communicated emotion and how it made me feel, left a lasting impression. *Ico* showed players that games could be a powerful and emotional medium. I feel as though *LittleBigPlanet* built on some of those foundations with the bond that people have with Sackboy.

What do you enjoy about the video games industry today?
Being surrounded by incredible talent. It's also a very unique and precious moment in the games industry. The power is back with the creators. Social, mobile and connected/interactive TV platforms are empowering creative teams to develop innovative content, which is taking the entire industry to a wider market.

What disappoints you about the video games industry today?
We don't do enough as an industry to encourage and foster new talent, whether that's graduates or smaller indies looking to build an exciting new company. We could and should do more.

We also continue to fall into the trap of developing games for gamers. That's why I love being involved with a company like Relentless. They make games for non-gamers and realised ten years ago that there are more non-gamers than those in the traditional gamer market.

Seems like an easy thing to figure out, especially now with Zynga, ngmoco and others leading the charge, but very few companies seem to deliver on it.

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